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THE WORKS OF

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

TUSITALA EDITION

VOL. XXXI

# THE LETTERS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

*VOLUME ONE*

EDITED BY

SIR SIDNEY COLVIN

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## NOTE

LETTERS marked with an asterisk in the Table of Contents appear for the first time in an edition designed for the general reader. Some of them have not been available before in book form.

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# INTRODUCTION

By Sir Sidney Colvin

THE circumstances which have made me responsible for selecting and editing the correspondence of Robert Louis Stevenson are the following. He was for many years my closest friend. We first met in 1873, when he was in his twenty-third year and I in my twenty-ninth, at the place and in the manner mentioned at page 63 of this volume. It was my good fortune then to be of use to him, partly by such technical hints as even the most brilliant beginner may take from an older hand, partly by recommending him to editors—first, if I remember aright, to Mr. Hamerton and Mr. Richmond Seeley, of the *Portfolio*, then in succession to Mr. George Grove (*Macmillan's Magazine*), Mr. Leslie Stephen (*Cornhill*), and Dr. Appleton (the *Academy*); and somewhat, lastly, by helping to raise him in the estimation of parents who loved but for the moment failed to understand him. It belonged to the richness of his nature to repay in all things much for little, ἑκατόμβοι' ἐννεαβοιῶν, and from these early relations sprang the affection and confidence, to me inestimable, of which the following correspondence bears evidence.

One day in the autumn of 1888, in the island of Tahiti, during an illness which he supposed might be his last, Stevenson put into the hands of his stepson, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, a sealed paper with a request that it might be opened after his death. He recovered, and had strength enough to enjoy six years more of active life and work in the Pacific Islands. When the end came, the paper was opened and found to contain, among other things, the expression of his wish that I should prepare for publication

" a selection of his letters and a sketch of his life." I had already in 1892, when he was anxious—needlessly, as it turned out—as to the provision he might be able to leave for his family, received from him a suggestion that " some kind of a book " might be made out of the monthly journal-letters which he had been in the habit of writing me from Samoa ; letters begun at first with no idea of publication and simply in order to maintain our intimacy, so far as might be, undiminished by separation. This part of his wishes I was able to carry out promptly, and the result appeared under the title *Vailima Letters* in the autumn following his death (1895). Lack of leisure delayed the execution of the remaining part. For one thing, the body of correspondence which came in from various quarters turned out much larger than had been anticipated. He did not love writing letters, and will be found somewhere in the following pages referring to himself as one " essentially and originally incapable of the art epistolary." That he was a bad correspondent had come to be an accepted view among his friends ; but in truth it was only during one period of his life that he at all deserved such a reproach.* At other times, as became apparent after his death, he had shown a degree of industry and spirit in letter-writing extraordinary considering his health and his occupations. It was indeed he and not his friends, as will abundantly appear in the course of these volumes, who oftenest had cause to complain of answers neglected or delayed. His letters, it is true, were often the most informal in the world, and he generally neglected to date them, a habit which is the despair of editors ; but after his own whim and fashion he wrote a great number, so that the work of sifting, copying, and arranging was long and laborious. It was not until the autumn of 1899 that the *Letters to his Family and Friends* were ready for publication, and in the meantime the task of writing the *Life* had been taken over by his cousin and my friend, Mr. Graham Balfour, who completed it two years later. Since then the

* From 1876 to 1879—see Introduction to Section IV. of the *Letters* (vol. xxxii).

two series of letters have been incorporated, with additions, into one and reprinted in a variety of forms, both separately and as integral parts of the several collected editions of the author's works. The sale of these works keeps increasing rather than falling off; editions keep multiplying; new generations of readers have found life and letters, nature and human nature, touched by R. L. S. at so many points with so vivifying and illuminating a charm that it has become scarcely possible to take up a newspaper or magazine without finding some reference to his work or name. The latest testimony to his hold upon English and Scottish readers all the world over is the issue in two forms and at two prices of the present edition named, after the name by which the natives called him in his Samoan house, the *Tusitala* edition. It is not within the scope of this edition to make public for the first time writings of Stevenson that have not hitherto been printed. Accordingly no attempt had been made to add either to the bulk or the intimacy of his correspondence from unpublished sources. On the other hand all letters hitherto printed are, it is believed and intended, here to be found collected. To the material given to the world in the imposing "Vailima" edition, whether by myself or by its editors independently of me —to this material much the most important addition here made consists of the early letters to Mrs. Sitwell (now Lady Colvin) which by her leave were printed for the first time in the *Empire Review* for June, July, and August, 1923.

Stevenson's express wish and injunction was that of his letters what should be printed should be "a selection"; and much, of course, remains and ought to remain unprinted. Some of the outpourings of his early time are still considered by those who received them too sacred and intimate for publicity. Many of the letters of his maturer years are dry business letters of no general interest: many others are mere scraps tossed in jest to his familiars and full of catchwords and codewords current in their talk but meaningless to outsiders. Above all, many have to be omitted because they deal with the intimate affairs of private persons. Stevenson has been sometimes called an

egoist, as though he had been one in the practical sense as well as in the sense of taking a lively interest in his own moods and doings. Nothing can be more untrue. The letters printed in these volumes are indeed for the most part about himself: but it was of himself that his correspondents of all things most cared to hear. If the letters concerned mainly or entirely with the private affairs of other people could be printed, the balance would come more than even. We should see him throwing himself with sympathetic ardour and without thought of self into the cares and interests of his correspondents, and should learn to recognise him as having been truly the helper in many a relation where he might naturally have been taken for the person helped.

As to the text here given, it is faithful to the original except in so far as I have used the editorial privilege of omission when I thought it desirable on any of the grounds above set forth, and as I have chosen to deviate occasionally from my own general rule of reproducing characteristic slips and oddities of spelling. In matters like the use of quote-marks, italics, and so forth, I have adopted a somewhat more uniform practice than his, which was very casual and variable. And I have done my best, with the aid of various kind helpers, to secure the right, or an approximately right, chronological order in the arrangement of the letters, —a matter of no small difficulty in the case of a writer who very rarely headed a letter with any date more exact than, at best, that of the year and month.

In their new guise, then, even more than in the old, and with their increased number, the Stevenson Letters will, I hope, prove to many readers a book humanly attractive and companionable beyond most others. To some, perhaps—(from this point I repeat with some correction and abridgment my Introduction of 1899)—to some, perhaps, the very lack of art as a correspondent to which Stevenson above pleads guilty may give the reading an added charm and flavour. What he could do as an artist in letters we know. I remember Sir John Millais, a shrewd and very independent judge of books, calling across to me at a dinner-

table, "You know Stevenson, don't you?" and then going on, "well, I wish you would tell him from me, if he cares to know, that to my mind he is the very first of living artists. I don't mean writers merely, but painters and all of us. Nobody living can see with such an eye as that fellow, and nobody is such a master of his tools." But in his letters, excepting a few written in youth and having more or less the character of exercises, and a few in after years which were intended for the public eye, Stevenson the deliberate artist is scarcely forthcoming at all. He does not care a fig for order or logical sequence or congruity, or for striking a key of expression and keeping it, but becomes simply the most spontaneous and unstudied of human beings. He has at his command the whole vocabularies of the English and Scottish languages, classical and slang,—the slang both of general use and of a kind of private code current among his intimates,—with good stores of the French, and tosses and tumbles them about irresponsibly to convey the impression or affection, the mood or freak of the moment; pouring himself out in all manner of rhapsodical confessions and speculations, grave or gay, notes of observation and criticism, snatches of remembrance and autobiography, moralisings on matters uppermost for the hour in his mind, comments on his own work or other people's, or mere idle fun and foolery.

By this medley of moods and manners, Stevenson's letters at their best come nearer than anything else to the full-blooded charm and variety of his conversation. Nearer, yet not quite near; for it was in company only that this genial spirit rose to his very best. Few men probably have had in them such a richness and variety of human nature; and few can ever have been better gifted than he was to express the play of being that was in him by means of the apt, expressive word and the animated look and gesture. *Divers et ondoyant*, in the words of Montaigne, beyond other men, he seemed to contain within himself a whole troop of singularly assorted characters. Though prose was his chosen medium of expression, he was by temperament a born poet, to whom the world was

full of enchantment and of latent romance, only waiting to take shape and substance in the forms of art. It was his birthright—

> " to hear
> The great bell beating far and near—
> The odd, unknown, enchanted gong
> That on the road hales men along,
> That from the mountain calls afar,
> That lures the vessel from a star,
> And with a still, aërial sound
> Makes all the earth enchanted ground."

He had not only the poet's mind but the poet's senses : in youth ginger was only too hot in his mouth, and the chimes at midnight only too favourite a music. At the same time he was not less a born preacher and moralist and son of the Covenanters after his fashion. He had about him, as has been said, little spirit of social or other conformity ; but an active and searching private conscience kept him for ever calling in question both the grounds of his own conduct and the validity of the accepted codes and compromises of society. He must try to work out a scheme of morality suitable to his own case and temperament, which found the prohibitory law of Moses chill and uninspiring, but in the Sermon on the Mount a strong incentive to all those impulses of pity and charity to which his heart was prone. In early days his sense of social injustice and the inequalities of human opportunity made him inwardly much of a rebel, who would have embraced and acted on theories of socialism or communism, could he have found any that did not seem to him at variance with ineradicable instincts of human nature. All his life the artist and the moralist in him alike were in rebellion against the bourgeois spirit,—against timid, negative, and shuffling substitutes for active and courageous well-doing,—and declined to worship at the shrine of what he called the bestial goddesses Comfort and Respectability. The moralist in him helped the artist by backing with the force of a highly sensitive conscience his instinctive love of perfection in his work. The artist qualified the moralist by discountenancing any preference

for the harsh, the sour, or the self-mortifying forms of virtue, and encouraging the love for all tender or heroic, glowing, generous, and cheerful forms.

Above all things, perhaps, Stevenson was by instinct an adventurer and practical experimentalist in life. Many poets are content to dream, and many, perhaps most, moralists to preach: Stevenson must ever be doing and undergoing. He was no sentimentalist, to pay himself with fine feelings whether for mean action or slack inaction. He had an insatiable zest for all experiences, not the pleasurable only, but including the more harsh and biting—those that bring home to a man the pinch and sting of existence as it is realised by the disinherited of the world, and excluding only what he thought the prim, the conventional, the dead-alive, and the cut-and-dry. On occasion the experimentalist and man of adventure in him would enter into special partnership with the moralist and man of conscience: he was prone to plunge into difficult social passes and ethical dilemmas, which he might sometimes more wisely have avoided, for the sake of trying to behave in them to the utmost according to his own personal sense of the obligation of honour, duty, and kindness. In yet another part of his being he cherished, as his great countryman Scott had done before him, an intense underlying longing for the life of action, danger, and command. "Action, Colvin, action," I remember his crying eagerly to me, with his hand on my arm as we lay basking for his health's sake in a boat off the scented shores of the Cap Martin. Another time—this was on his way to a winter cure at Davos—some friend had given him General Hamley's *Operations of War*:—"in which," he writes to his father, "I am drowned a thousand fathoms deep, and O that I had been a soldier is still my cry." Fortunately, with all these ardent and divers instincts, there were present two invaluable gifts besides: that of humour, which for all his stress of being and vivid consciousness of self saved him from ever seeing himself for long together out of a just proportion, and kept wholesome laughter always ready at his lips; and that of a most tender and loyal heart, which

through all his experiments and agitations made the law of kindness the one ruling law of his life. In the end, lack of health determined his career, giving the chief part in his life to the artist and man of imagination, and keeping the man of action a prisoner in the sick-room until, by a singular turn of destiny, he was able to wring a real, prolonged, and romantically successful adventure out of that voyage to the Pacific which had been, in its origin, the last despairing resource of the invalid.

Again, it was characteristic of this multiple personality that he never seemed to be cramped like the rest of us, at any given time of life, within the limits of his proper age, but to be child, boy, young man, and old man all at once. There was never a time in his life when Stevenson had to say with St. Augustine, "Behold! my childhood is dead, but I am alive." The child lived on always in him, not in memory only, but in real survival, with all its freshness of perception unimpaired, and none of its play instincts in the least degree extinguished or made ashamed. As for the perennial boy in Stevenson, that is too apparent to need remark. It was as a boy for boys that he wrote the best known of his books, *Treasure Island*, and with all boys that he met, provided they were really boys and not prigs nor puppies, he was instantly and delightedly at home. At the same time, even when I first knew him, he showed already surprising occasional traits and glimpses of old sagacity, of premature life-wisdom and experience.

Once more, it is said that in every poet there must be something of the woman. If to be quick in sympathy and feeling, ardent in attachment, and full of pity for the weak and suffering, is to be womanly, Stevenson was certainly all those; he was even like a woman in being ἀρτίδακρυς, easily moved to tears at the touch of pity or affection, or even at any specially poignant impression of art or beauty. But yet, if any one word were to be chosen for the predominant quality of his character and example, I suppose that word would be manly. In his gentle and complying nature there were strains of iron tenacity and will: occasionally even, let it be admitted, of perversity and Scottish

" thrawnness." He had both kinds of physical courage—the active, delighting in danger, and the passive, unshaken in endurance. In the moral courage of facing situations and consequences, of readiness to pay for faults committed, of outspokenness, admitting no ambiguous relations and clearing away the clouds from human intercourse, I have not known his equal. The great Sir Walter himself, as this book will prove, was not more manfully free from artistic jealousy or irritability under criticism, or more unfeignedly inclined to exaggerate the qualities of other people's work and to underrate those of his own. To quote again from my early Introduction. " Of the humorous and engaging parts of vanity and egoism, which led him to make infinite talk and fun about himself, and use his own experiences as a key for unlocking the confidences of others, Stevenson had plenty ; but of the morose and fretful parts never a shade. ' A little Irish girl,' he wrote once during a painful crisis of his life, ' is now reading my book aloud to her sister at my elbow ; they chuckle, and I feel flattered.—Yours, R. L. S. *P.S.*—Now they yawn, and I am indifferent. Such a wisely conceived thing is vanity.' " If only vanity so conceived were commoner ! And whatever might be the abstract and philosophical value of that somewhat grimly stoical conception of the universe, of conduct and duty, at which in mature years he had arrived, want of manliness is certainly not its fault. Take the kind of maxims which he was accustomed to forge for his own guidance :—" Acts may be forgiven ; not even God can forgive the hanger-back." " Choose the best, if you can ; or choose the worst ; that which hangs in the wind dangles from a gibbet." " ' Shall I ? ' said Feeble-mind ; and the echo said, ' Fie ! ' ' Do I love ? ' said Loveless ; and the echo laughed." " A fault known is a fault cured to the strong ; but to the weak it is a fetter riveted." " The mean man doubts, the great-hearted is deceived." " Great-heart was deceived. ' Very well,' said Great-heart." " ' I have not forgotten my umbrella,' said the careful man ; but the lightning struck him." " Shame had a fine bed, but where was slumber ? Once

he was in jail he slept." With this moralist maxims meant actions ; and where shall we easily find a much manlier spirit of wisdom than this ?

There was yet another and very different side to Stevenson which struck others more than it struck myself, namely, that of the freakish or elvish, irresponsible madcap or jester which sometimes appeared in him. It is true that his demoniac quickness of wit and intelligence suggested occasionally a " spirit of air and fire " rather than one of earth ; that he was abundantly given to all kinds of quirk and laughter ; and that there was no jest (saving the unkind) he would not make and relish. The late Mr. J. A. Symonds always called him Sprite ; qualifying the name, however, by the epithetic " most fantastic, but most human." To me the essential humanity was always the thing most apparent. In a fire well nourished of seasoned ship-timber, the flames glance fantastically and of many colours, but the glow at heart is ever deep and strong ; it was at such a glow that the friends of Stevenson were accustomed to warm their hands, while they admired and were entertained by the shifting lights.

It was only in company, as I have said, that all these many lights and colours could be seen in full play. He would begin no matter how—perhaps with a jest at some absurd adventure of his own, perhaps with the recitation, in his vibrating voice and full Scotch accent, of some snatch of poetry that was haunting him, perhaps with a rhapsody of analytic delight over some minute accident of beauty or expressiveness that had struck him in man, woman, child, or external nature. And forthwith the floodgates would be opened, and the talk would stream on in endless, never importunate, flood and variety. A hundred fictitious characters would be invented and launched on their imaginary careers ; a hundred ingenious problems of conduct and cases of honour would be set and solved ; romantic voyages would be planned and followed out in vision, with a thousand incidents ; the possibilities of life and art would be illuminated with searchlights of bewildering range and penetration, sober argument and high

poetic eloquence alternating with coruscations of insanely apposite slang—the earthiest jape anon shooting up into the empyrean and changing into the most ethereal fantasy —the stalest and most vulgarised forms of speech gaining brilliancy and illuminating power from some hitherto undreamt-of application—and all the while an atmosphere of goodwill diffusing itself from the speaker, a glow of eager benignity and affectionate laughter emanating from his presence, till every one about him seemed to catch something of his gift and inspiration. This sympathetic power of inspiring others was the special and distinguishing note of Stevenson's conversation. He would keep a houseful or a single companion entertained all day, and day after day and half the nights, yet never seemed to monopolise the talk or absorb it ; rather he helped every one about him to discover and to exercise unexpected powers of their own.

Imagine all this helped by the most speaking of presences : a steady, penetrating fire in the brown, wide-set eyes, a compelling power and richness in the smile ; courteous, waving gestures of the arms and long, nervous hands, a lit cigarette generally held between the fingers ; continual rapid shiftings and pacings to and fro as he conversed : rapid, but not flurried nor awkward, for there was a grace in his attenuated but well-carried figure, and his movements were light, deft, and full of spring. There was something for strangers, and even for friends, to get over in the queer garments which in youth it was his whim to wear—the badge, as they always seemed to me, partly of a genuine carelessness, certainly of a genuine lack of cash (the little he had was always absolutely at the disposal of his friends), partly of a deliberate detachment from any particular social class or caste, partly of his love of pickles and adventures, which he thought befell a man thus attired more readily than another. But this slender, slovenly, nondescript apparition, long-visaged and long-haired, had only to speak in order to be recognised in the first minute for a witty and charming gentleman, and within the first five for a master spirit and man of genius. There were,

indeed, certain stolidly conventional and superciliously official kinds of persons, both at home and abroad, who were incapable of looking beyond the clothes, and eyed him always with frozen suspicion. This attitude used sometimes in youth to drive him into fits of flaming anger, which put him helplessly at a disadvantage unless, or until, he could call the sense of humour to his help. Apart from these his human charm was the same for all kinds of people, without distinction of class or caste ; for worldly-wise old great ladies, whom he reminded of famous poets in their youth ; for his brother artists and men of letters, perhaps, above all ; for the ordinary clubman ; for his physicians, who could never do enough for him ; for domestic servants, who adored him ; for the English police-man even, on whom he often tried, quite in vain, to pass himself as one of the criminal classes ; for the shepherd, the street arab, or the tramp, the common seaman, the beach-comber, or the Polynesian high-chief. Even in the imposed silence and restraint of extreme sickness the power and attraction of the man made themselves felt, and there seemed to be more vitality and fire of the spirit in him as he lay exhausted and speechless in bed than in an ordinary roomful of people in health.

But I have strayed from my purpose, which was only to indicate that in the best of these letters of Stevenson's you have some echo, far away indeed, but yet the nearest, of his talk—talk which could not possibly be taken down, and of which nothing remains save in the memory of his friends an impression magical and never to be effaced.

S. C.

# I

# STUDENT DAYS AT EDINBURGH

## TRAVELS AND EXCURSIONS

## 1868—1873

# THE LETTERS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

## I

## STUDENT DAYS AT EDINBURGH

THE following section consists chiefly of extracts from the correspondence and journals addressed by Louis Stevenson, as a lad of eighteen to twenty-two, to his father and mother during summer excursions to the Scottish coast or to the Continent. Among them are interspersed four or five addressed to other correspondents, and chiefly to his lifelong friend and intimate, Mr. Charles Baxter.

On both sides of the house Stevenson came of interesting stock. His grandfather was Robert Stevenson, civil engineer, highly distinguished as the builder of the Bell Rock lighthouse. By this Robert Stevenson and several generations of his descendants the business of civil engineers in general, and of official engineers to the Commissioners of Northern Lights in particular, has been carried on at Edinburgh with high credit and public utility for almost a century. Thomas Stevenson, the youngest of the three sons of the original Robert, was Robert Louis Stevenson's father. He was a man not only of mark, zeal, and inventiveness in his profession, but of a strong and singular personality; a staunch friend and sagacious adviser, trenchant in judgment and demonstrative in emotion, outspoken, dogmatic,—despotic, even in little things, but withal essentially chivalrous and soft-hearted; apt to pass with the swiftest transition from moods of gloom or stern-

ness to those of tender or freakish gaiety, and commanding a gift of humorous and figurative speech second only to that of his famous son.

Thomas Stevenson was married to Margaret Isabella, youngest daughter of the Rev. Lewis Balfour, for many years minister of the parish of Colinton in Midlothian. This Mr. Balfour (described by his grandson in the essay called *The Manse*) was of the stock of the Balfours of Pilrig, and grandson to that James Balfour, professor first of moral philosophy and afterwards of the law of nature and of nations, who was held in particular esteem as a philosophical controversialist by David Hume. His wife, Henrietta Smith, a daughter of the Rev. George Smith of Galston, to whose gift as a preacher Burns refers scoffingly in the *Holy Fair*, is said to have been a woman of uncommon beauty and charm of manner. Their daughter, Mrs. Thomas Stevenson, suffered in early and middle life from chest and nerve troubles, and her son may have inherited from her some of his constitutional weakness. Capable, cultivated, companionable, charming, she was a determined looker at the bright side of things, and hence better skilled, perhaps, to shut her eyes to troubles or differences among those she loved than to understand, compose, or heal them. Conventionally minded one might have thought her, but for the surprising readiness with which in later life she adapted herself to conditions of life and travel the most unconventional possible. The son and only child of these two, Robert Louis (baptized Robert Lewis Balfour *), was born on November 13, 1850, at 8 Howard Place, Edinburgh. His health was infirm from the first, and he was with difficulty kept alive by the combined care of his mother and a most devoted nurse, Alison Cunningham; to whom his lifelong gratitude will be found touchingly expressed in the course of the following letters. In 1858 he was near dying of a gastric fever, and

* It was the father who, from dislike of a certain Edinburgh Lewis, changed the sound and spelling of his son's second name to Louis (spoken always with the "s" sounded), and it was the son himself who about his eighteenth year dropped the use of his third name and initial altogether.

was at all times subject to acute catarrhal and bronchial affections and extreme nervous excitability.

In January, 1853, Stevenson's parents moved to 1 Inverleith Terrace, and in May, 1857, to 17 Heriot Row, which continued to be their Edinburgh home until the death of Thomas Stevenson in 1887. Much of the boy's time was also spent in the manse of Colinton on the Water of Leith, the home of his maternal grandfather. Ill-health prevented him getting much regular or continuous schooling. He attended first (1858–61) a preparatory school kept by a Mr. Henderson in India Street; and next (at intervals for some time after the autumn of 1861) the Edinburgh Academy.

Schooling was interrupted in the end of 1862 and first half of 1863 by excursions with his parents to Germany, the Riviera, and Italy. The love of wandering, which was a rooted passion in Stevenson's nature, thus began early to find satisfaction. For a few months in the autumn of 1863, when his parents had been ordered for a second time to Mentone for the sake of his mother's health, he was sent to a boarding-school kept by a Mr. Wyatt at Spring Grove, near London. It is not my intention to treat the reader to the series of childish and boyish letters of these days which parental fondness has preserved. But here is one written from his English school when he was about thirteen, which is both amusing in itself and had a certain influence on his destiny, inasmuch as his appeal led to his being taken out to join his parents on the French Riviera; which from these days of his boyhood he never ceased to love, and for which the longing, amid the gloom of Edinburgh winters, often afterwards gripped him by the heart.

*Spring Grove School, 12th November* 1863

MA CHERE MAMAN,—Jai recu votre lettre Aujourdhui et comme le jour prochaine est mon jour de naisance je vous écrit ce lettre. Ma grande gatteaux est arrivé il leve 12 livres et demi le prix etait 17 shillings. Sur la soirée de Monseigneur Faux il y etait quelques belles feux d'artifice. Mais les polissons entrent dans notre champ et nos feux

d'artifice et handkerchiefs disappeared quickly, but we charged them out of the field. Je suis presque driven mad par une bruit terrible tous les garcons kik up comme grand un bruit qu'il est possible. I hope you will find your house at Mentone nice. I have been obliged to stop from writing by the want of a pen, but now I have one, so I will continue.

My dear papa, you told me to tell you whenever I was miserable. I do not feel well, and I wish to get home. Do take me with you.

R. STEVENSON.

This young French scholar has yet, it will be discerned, a good way to travel; in later days he acquired a complete reading and speaking, with a less complete writing, mastery of the language, and was as much at home with French ways of thought and life as with English.

I cannot refrain from printing another letter of this year which has recently come to light.

### TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

*[Nov. or Dec. 1863]*
*Rostrevor House, Spring Grove, Middlesex*

MY DEAR MAM,—I hope that the sitting room has got a good view of "La Mediteranee." I was at the Hilbury's to tea yesterday. We had parlour croquet and Mrs. Hilbury called me the turk, because I used to croquet everyone. After that we had some Old Maid and then such an amusing game called "Fright." Janey Wilson is staying at Uncle Mack's and her brother sent a telegram about some trains at which he was to meet her. It arrived at Aunt Carry's after they were all in bed and all the servants and Aunt Carry were in such a fright till they found out what it was. My dear mama I am to send 7 loves from 7 different people.

I remain
your afft. son
R. STEVENSON.

For one more specimen of his boyish style, it may be not amiss to give the text of another appeal which dates from two and a half years later, and is also typical of much in his life's conditions both then and later :—

*2 Sulyarde Terrace,*
*Torquay, Thursday* [*April* 1866]

Respected Paternal Relative,—I write to make a request of the most moderate nature. Every year I have cost you an enormous—nay, elephantine—sum of money for drugs and physician's fees, and the most expensive time of the twelve months was March.

But this year the biting Oriental blasts, the howling tempests, and the general ailments of the human race have been successfully braved by yours truly.

Does not this deserve remuneration ?

I appeal to your charity, I appeal to your generosity, I appeal to your justice, I appeal to your accounts, I appeal, in fine, to your purse.

My sense of generosity forbids the receipt of more—my sense of justice forbids the receipt of less—than half-a-crown.—Greeting from, Sir, your most affectionate and needy son,

R. Stevenson.

From 1864 to 1867 Stevenson's education was conducted chiefly at Mr. Thomson's private school in Frederick Street, Edinburgh, and by private tutors in various places to which he travelled for his own or his parents' health. These travels included frequent visits to such Scottish health resorts as Bridge of Allan, Dunoon, Rothesay, North Berwick, Lasswade, and Peebles, and occasional excursions with his father on his nearer professional rounds to the Scottish coasts and lighthouses. From 1867 the family life became more settled between Edinburgh and Swanston Cottage, Lothianburn, a country home in the Pentlands which Mr. Stevenson first rented in that year, and the scenery and associations of which sank deeply into the young man's spirit, and vitally affected his after thoughts and his art.

By this time Louis Stevenson seemed to show signs of outgrowing his early infirmities of health. He was a lover, to a degree even beyond his strength, of outdoor life and exercise (though not of sports), and it began to be hoped that as he grew up he would be fit to enter the family profession of civil engineer. He was accordingly entered as a student at Edinburgh University, and for several winters attended classes there with such regularity as his health and inclinations permitted. This was in truth but small. The mind on fire with its own imaginations, and eager to acquire its own experiences in its own way, does not take kindly to the routine of classes and repetitions, nor could the desultory mode of schooling enforced upon him by ill-health answer much purpose by way of discipline. According to his own account he was at college, as he had been at school, an inveterate idler and truant. But outside the field of school and college routine he showed an eager curiosity and activity of mind. " He was of a conversable temper," so he says of himself, " and insatiably curious in the aspects of life, and spent much of his time scraping acquaintance with all classes of men and womankind." Of one class, indeed, and that was his own, he had soon had enough, at least in so far as it was to be studied at the dinners, dances, and other polite entertainments of ordinary Edinburgh society. Of these he early wearied. At home he made himself pleasant to all comers, but for his own resort chose out a very few houses, mostly those of intimate college companions, into which he could go without constraint, and where his inexhaustible flow of poetic, imaginative, and laughing talk seems generally to have rather puzzled his hearers than impressed them. On the other hand, during his endless private rambles and excursions, whether among the streets and slums, the gardens and graveyards of the city, or farther afield among the Pentland hills or on the shores of Forth, he was never tired of studying character and seeking acquaintance among the classes more nearly exposed to the pinch and stress of life.

In the eyes of anxious elders, such vagrant ways naturally take on the colours of idleness and a love of low company.

Stevenson was, however, in his own fashion an eager student of books as well as of man and nature. He read precociously and omnivorously in the *belles-lettres*, including a very wide range of English poetry, fiction, and essays, and a fairly wide range of French ; and was a genuine student of Scottish history, especially from the time of the persecutions down, and to some extent of history in general. The art of literature was already his private passion, and something within him even already told him that it was to be his life's work. On all his truantries he went pencil and copy-book in hand, trying to fit his impression of the scene to words, to compose original rhymes, tales, dialogues, and dramas, or to imitate the style and cadences of the author he at the moment preferred. For three or four years, nevertheless, he tried dutifully, if half-heartedly, to prepare himself for the family profession. In 1868, the year when the following correspondence opens, he went to watch the works of the firm in progress first at Anstruther on the coast of Fife, and afterwards at Wick. In 1869 he made the tour of the Orkneys and Shetlands on board the steam yacht of the Commissioners of Northern Lights, and in 1870 the tour of the Western Islands, preceded by a stay on the isle of Earraid, where the works of the Dhu Heartach lighthouse were then in progress. He was a favourite, although a very irregular, pupil of the professor of engineering, Fleeming Jenkin, whose friendship and that of Mrs. Jenkin were of great value to him, and whose life he afterwards wrote ; and must have shown some aptitude for the family calling, inasmuch as in 1871 he received the silver medal of the Edinburgh Society of Arts for a paper on a suggested improvement in lighthouse apparatus.

The outdoor and seafaring parts of an engineer's life were in fact wholly to his taste. But he looked instinctively at the powers and phenomena of waves and tide, of storm and current, reef, cliff, and rock, with the eye of the poet and artist, and not those of the practician and calculator. For desk work and office routine he had an unconquerable aversion ; and his physical powers, had they remained at their best, must have proved unequal to the workshop

training necessary to the practical engineer. Accordingly in 1871 it was agreed, not without natural reluctance on his father's part, that he should give up the hereditary vocation and read for the bar: literature, on which his heart was set, and in which his early attempts had been encouraged, being held to be by itself no profession, or at least one altogether too irregular and undefined. For the next several years, therefore, he attended law classes instead of engineering and science classes in the University, giving to the subject a certain amount of serious, although fitful, attention until he was called to the bar in 1875.

So much for the course of Stevenson's outward life during these days at Edinburgh. To tell the story of his inner life would be a far more complicated task, and cannot here be attempted even briefly. The ferment of youth was more acute and more prolonged in him than in most men even of genius. There met in him many various strains and elements, which were in these days pulling one against another in his half-formed being at a great expense of spirit and body. Add the storms, which from time to time attacked him, of shivering repulsion from the climate and conditions of life in the city which he yet deeply and imaginatively loved; the moods of spiritual revolt against the harsh doctrines of the creed in which he had been brought up, and to which his parents were deeply, his father even passionately, attached; the seasons of temptation, most strongly besetting the ardent and poetic temperament, to seek solace among the crude allurements of the city streets.

In the later and maturer correspondence which will appear in these volumes, the agitations of the writer's early days are often enough referred to in retrospect. In the boyish letters to his parents, which make up the chief part of this first section, they naturally find no expression at all; nor will these letters be found to differ much in any way from those of any other lively and observant lad who is also something of a reader and has some natural gift of writing. At the end of the section I have indeed printed one cry of the heart, written not to his parents, but about them, and telling of the strain which matters of religious

difference for a while brought into his home relations. The attachment between the father and son from childhood was exceptionally strong. But the father was staunchly wedded to the hereditary creeds and dogmas of Scottish Calvinistic Christianity; while the course of the young man's reading, with the spirit of the generation in which he grew up, had loosed him from the bonds of that theology and even of dogmatic Christianity in general, and had taught him to respect all creeds alike as expressions of the cravings and conjectures of the human spirit in face of the unsolved mystery of things, rather than to cling to any one of them as a revelation of ultimate truth. The shock to the father was great when his son's opinions came to his knowledge; and there ensued a time of extremely painful discussion and private tension between them. In due time this cloud upon a family life otherwise very harmonious and affectionate passed quite away. But the greater the love, the greater the pain; and when I first knew Stevenson this trouble gave him no peace, and it has left a strong trace upon his mind and work. See particularly the parable called *The House of Eld* in his collection of *Fables*, and the many studies of difficult paternal and filial relations which are to be found in *The Story of a Lie*, *The Misadventures of John Nicholson*, *The Wrecker*, and *Weir of Hermiston*.

## To Thomas Stevenson

In July, 1868, R. L. S. went to watch the harbour works at Anstruther in Fife and afterwards those at Wick in Caithness. Of his private moods and occupations in the Anstruther days he has told in retrospect in the essay, *Random Memories : the Coast of Fife*. Here are some passages from letters written at the time to his parents. "Travellers" and "jennies" are of course terms of engineering.

First sheet : Thursday
Second sheet : Friday

*'Kenzie House*
*or whatever it is called,*
*Anstruther,* [*July,* 1868]

My dear Father,—My lodgings are very nice, and I don't think there are any children. There is a box of mignonette in the window and a factory of dried rose-leaves, which make the atmosphere a trifle heavy, but very pleasant.

When you come, bring also my paint-box—I forgot it. I am going to try the travellers and jennies, and have made a sketch of them and begun the drawing. After that I'll do the staging.

Mrs. Brown "has suffered herself from her stommick, and that makes her kind of think for other people." She is a motherly lot. Her mothering and thought for others displays itself in advice against hard-boiled eggs, well-done meat, and late dinners, these being my only requests. Fancy—I am the only person in Anstruther who dines in the afternoon.

If you could bring me some wine when you come, 'twould be a good move : I fear *vin d'Anstruther ;* and having procured myself a severe attack of gripes by two days' total abstinence on chilly table beer, I have been forced to purchase Green Ginger ("Somebody or other's 'celebrated'"), for the benefit of my stomach, like St. Paul.

There is little or nothing doing here to be seen. By heightening the corner in a hurry to support the staging they have let the masons get ahead of the divers and wait till they can overtake them. I wish you would write and

put me up to the sort of things to ask and find out. I received your registered letter with the £5; it will last for ever. To-morrow I will watch the masons at the pier-foot and see how long they take to work that Fife-ness stone you ask about; they get sixpence an hour; so that is the only datum required.

It is awful how slowly I draw, and how ill: I am not nearly done with the travellers, and have not thought of the jennies yet. When I'm drawing, I find out something I have not measured, or having measured, have not noted, or, having noted, cannot find; and so I have to trudge to the pier again ere I can go farther with my noble design.

I haven't *seen* fruit since I left.

Love to all.—Your affectionate son,

R. L. STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

*'Kenzie House, Anstruther [later in July,* 1868]

MY DEAR MOTHER,—To-night I went with the youngest Morrison to see a strolling band of players in the townhall. A large table placed below the gallery with a print curtain on either side of the most limited dimensions was at once the scenery and the proscenium. The manager told us that his scenes were sixteen by sixty-four, and so could not be got in. Though I knew, or at least felt sure, that there were no such scenes in the poor man's possession, I could not laugh, as did the major part of the audience, at this shift to escape criticism. We saw a wretched farce, and some comic songs were sung. The manager sang one, but it came grimly from his throat. The whole receipt of the evening was 5s. and 3d. out of which had to come room, gas, and town drummer. We left soon; and I must say came out as sad as I have been for ever so long: I think that manager had a soul above comic songs. I said this to young Morrison, who is a "Phillistine" (Matthew Arnold's Philistine you understand), and he replied, "How much happier he would be as a common workingman!"

I told him I thought he would be less happy earning a comfortable living as a shoemaker than he was starving as an actor, with such artistic work as he had to do. But the Phillistine wouldn't see it. You observe that I spell Philistine time about with one and two l's.

As we went home we heard singing, and went into the porch of the schoolhouse to listen. A fisherman entered and told us to go in. It was a psalmody class. One of the girls had a glorious voice. We stayed for half an hour.

*Tuesday.*—I am utterly sick of this grey, grim, sea-beaten hole. I have a little cold in my head, which makes my eyes sore; and you can't tell how utterly sick I am, and how anxious to get back among trees and flowers and something less meaningless than this bleak fertility.

Papa need not imagine that I have a bad cold or am stone-blind from this description which is the whole truth.

Last night Mr. and Mrs. Fortune called in a dog-cart, Fortune's beard and Mrs. F.'s brow glittering with mist-drops, to ask me to come next Saturday. Conditionally, I accepted. Do you think I can cut it? I am only anxious to go slick home on the Saturday. Write by return of post and tell me what to do. If possible, I should like to cut the business and come right slick out to Swanston.—I remain, your affectionate son,

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

The Murray here mentioned was a Writer to the Signet not otherwise remembered. Degenerate Douglas, like the Mr. and Mrs. Fortune of the last letter, seems a person unidentifiable: so also Beales and Hislop. The penny enclosed seems to have been as a fine for the use of the mild objurgation "blow."

*Anchor House, Sunday Evening.* [*Undated*]

My dear Mammer,—Got here all right. Was it not funny that I saw the Murrays at Leadbarn? After they left I got awful dull and, Blow! (I mean blow my nose) * I was constrained to jump about, walk up and down and

* Penny Enclosed.

box the air. Suddenly in the middle of these evolutions, the train stopped, and I thought it as well to guard against interruptions by casting myself down in a position at once dignified and graceful. As well I did it! An old man came in, tall, thin, cadaverous, in clothes made for St. Edmund the pride of our city, the choice of our electors. I addressed to him some remarks on the subject of the weather; but he appeared completely shut up by the novelty of my views on the subject, as he said no more till the end of our journey. By dwelling upon this subject, it seems that his mind, too weak to grapple with such subjects, became entirely deranged, for he suddenly began to talk aloud to himself and to snap his fingers, and to nod his head in an encouraging manner. At first I expected to be Murdered; but the journey ended too soon and I was rescued.

I had an ice at Blair's as I said I would.

Tell Degenerate Douglas that here no Romola drinks behind doors and here no Tito raves and tells lies—that, in a word, this is the land of freedom.

Tell Romola that Beales was playing golf here yesterday with Prince Alfred. B. had been drinking and knocked the Prince down for a blow'd artistocrat—so she needn't laugh at me any more for my word: it is a word hallowed by the usage of a patriot and a reformer.

Mary is seedy; and her Hislop has been here. It is a headacher—her ailment (second thought): silence reighens (reigns).*

Your afft. son
R. L. STEVENSON.

Luck to Papa!

*N.B.*—I am not going to ask for messages as I am tired of writing used all my paper: can't write again.

By the by I'm brewing radical too. Nothing about anything but *subjects* in the first sheet.

* Please excuse after dinner.

### To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

[*Anstruther, July,* 1868]
*Tuesday*

My dear Mother,—Tell Papa that his boat-builders are the most illiterate writers with whom I have ever had any dealing. From beginning to end of their precious specification, there was no stop whether comma, semi-colon, colon, or point; and to tell whether the adjectives belonged to the previous or subsequent noun, was work for five experienced boat-builders. However, I made daylight of it, copied it and sent it to Parringer—it took me and Mitchell two hours to understand the part called "the specification" and there were several parts in the "offer" or "tender" which had to be copied as well. So confused, indeed, and so insufficient was the whole thing that the saving clause smuggled in in the tender, "and all things not fully specified needful for efficient service," forms its whole value. Have you sent the Essays off? Do see to it!

Can you find and send to me the last lines of Longfellow's Golden Legend, beginning:

"It is Lucifer, son of the air," and so on. "Since God put him there he is God's minister for some good end."

### To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

*Kenzie House, Anstruther,*
*Thursday, July,* 1868

My dear Mere,—I don't remember whose turn it is. It is as well 'twas you that reproached me about the legibility of my hand and not the other parient: his last letter, though of commendable brevity, took me two hours to decipher finally: verily he must have been worried that day: such a scrawl it has been seldom my fate to decipher.

I shall want some more money soon. My next Saturday's excursion will make me unable to meet Mrs. Brown on Monday.

I got a very kind note from Mrs. Fortune addressed "Lewis Balfour"!—asking me next Saturday but Aunt Judy had made an engagement for me to go with her somewhere, some "Hall" or another; so I was obliged to refuse.

All is going on well.

I got Carlyle and am duly obliged.

I wish this to go to-night.

So excuse brevity: I only follow the example of both parents. Give my love to Auntie. Ask Papa why the stones of the last runt are placed flat.

Your afft. son
R. L. STEVENSON.

## To THOMAS STEVENSON

*New Harbour Hotel, Pulteney,*
[*September*, 1868]

MY DEAR FATHER,—I hope your asthma is all right now. I think what you say about the diving is nonsense. I should only try in shallow water and if any effect were produced could go out immediately: if all were right, should go in deeper gradually. Besides if I don't get a shot at it, I lose great part of my idea of the walk.

## To MR. AND MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

Some of the allusions in the following, both technical and personal, are at this distance of time irrecoverable; the main point being the threatened failure of the harbour works on which the family firm was engaged at Anstruther.

[*September*, 1868] *Wednesday, Wick*

MY DEAR FATHER,—I am awfully sorry about Anstruther. It was that confounded Billowness—hearting—so much sand, french chalk coagulated with water! It is the very last stuff to put for hearting at any rate; for it will crush to bits. I suppose it washed out from the open end; and the sea *exploded* the Ivory-wall. I fancy Adamson's face!

Poor, poor bankrupt Harbour-Cominpéon ! I am glad the sea-wall stood ; but I quake for it to-night : the wind is up again, and the sea ; the men could do nothing to-day. J'espère qu'il tiendra !

There is an awful mess below water here ; but him-and-I is in great glee about it. " When he seen the account, he took the arm of (someone not known, action illustrated on me) and he pointed to the breakwater " : " Sixty pounds'll do us " was his remarkable speech. It was awfully decent of him to write that about me ; and I am glad it went through the hands of somebodee !

My dear Mother,—The rest of the letter will be more acceptable to you. Did you not get my letter about the lighter work—the one I told you to show to Willie ? If you did not, it has gone astray and should be seen to.

Mrs. Wemyss (Sir George Dunbar's niece and house keeperess) asked me on Monday to go to Ackergill Tower either on Tuesday or Wednesday. On Wednesday I and Adam Rupel got a boat and took Sara R. and the latter person (in future I shall call them the former and the latta) out for a row. I reckoned that decidedly 'cuter ; and elected Wednesday for Ackergill. To-day it blew, it rained. What could I do ? Rain excused to-day ; but what about yesterday ? So I e'en trudged it. Mrs. Wemyss is so nice and so kind that I was not sorry I had persevered. She has a son there, the handsomest lad I ever saw, a midshipman in the *Warrior*. Poor fellow ! he burst a blood vessel some time ago. He does not know it is in his lungs. It is very sad to see him. His breathing becomes sometimes very short and bad, and he has a hard, painful cough. Poor Mrs. W. looks so very much put about when he coughs. She has the prettiest little children I ever saw. I was there till about four, lunched in a pannelled " baronial " hall quite scenic in its appearance. It is a delightful old house with a green room and a red room, the spectre of a black cook who fell into the well-hole and the ghost of an interesting young lady who flung herself off the top of the tower, because she had been *abduced* or

abducted, or whatever it is, and kept in durance vile by its amiable possessor. She asked me to come back again before I left, lent me books and said that " Will " (name of the sick fellow) should call on me the first time he was out. I got a lift in, in a " gig "—merciful powers, a gig ! and from a tower ! extremes meet—such is life ! (which I take it is not the *first* time that the last ingenious remark has been made).

The row was no end : seven ft. of a swell : imagine Mademoiselle teasing me by saying : " Tell us something to make us laugh, Mr. Stevenson." Adam the first said it was as bad as being introduced to a girl as " a very funny person." What wit is it that says it should be said to you ere you sit to be photographed, in order to induce a fitting solemnity of visage.

I am glad papa is better : the sea-side does not agree so well as the hills with him.

Your afft. son
R. L. STEVENSON.

## To THOMAS STEVENSON

*Wick, Sept.*, 1868
*Wednesday*

I WENT and saw Rutherford yesterday. He was very kind and friendly. I was introduced to Madame and Mademoiselle, and took lunch : he gave me advice. So you see, so far at least, that has been a better speculation than was expected.

What is the weight of a square foot of *salt* water ? and how many lbs. are there to a ton ?

I think you had better not send that certificate of extra-work till the cross wall is finished. Take care how you word it ; my soul is not mine own down here : and " him and I " will do his best to him-and-I it.

Would it not interest you and be of use in some future report to have the measurements and calculated weight of any stones which have been evidently moved by the sea ?

There is a free church minister here just now. Ah fie! what a creed! He told me point blank that all Roman Catholics would be damned. I'd rather have MacDonald's amiable infidelity, than this harsh-judging self-righteous form of faith. (I don't mean him-and-I, you know, but George MacDonald, the writer.)

I remain

Your affectionate son

R. L. Stevenson.

*P.S.*—Remove your veto from the diving, by doing it in that cautious way no harm could ensue. Ask G. B.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

An early *Portfolio* paper *On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places,* as well as the second part of the *Random Memories* essay, written twenty years later, refer to the same experiences as the following letters. Stevenson lodged during his stay at Wick in a private hotel on the Harbour Brae, kept by a Mr. Sutherland.*

*Wick, Friday, September* 11, 1868

My dear Mother,— . . . Wick lies at the end or elbow of an open triangular bay, hemmed on either side by shores, either cliff or steep earthbank, of no great height. The grey houses of Pulteney extend along the southerly shore almost to the cape; and it is about half-way down this shore — no, six-sevenths way down — that the new breakwater extends athwart the bay.

Certainly Wick in itself possesses no beauty: bare, grey shores, grim grey houses, grim grey seas; not even the gleam of red tiles; not even the greenness of a tree. The southerly heights, when I came here, were black with people, fishers waiting on wind and night. Now all the S. Y. S. (Stornoway boats) have beaten out of the bay, and the Wick men stay indoors or wrangle on the quays with dissatisfied fish-curers, knee-high in brine, mud, and herring refuse. The day when the boats put out to go

* See a paper on *R. L. Stevenson in Wick*, by Margaret H. Robertson in Magazine of Wick Literary Society, Christmas, 1903.

home to the Hebrides, the girl here told me there was " a black wind " ; and on going out, I found the epithet as justifiable as it was picturesque. A cold, *black* southerly wind, with occasional rising showers of rain ; it was a fine sight to see the boats beat out a-teeth of it.

In Wick I have never heard any one greet his neighbour with the usual " Fine day " or " Good morning." Both come shaking their heads, and both say, " Breezy, breezy ! " And such is the atrocious quality of the climate, that the remark is almost invariably justified by the fact.

The streets are full of the Highland fishers, lubberly, stupid, inconceivably lazy and heavy to move. You bruise against them, tumble them over, elbow them against the wall—all to no purpose ; they will not budge ; and you are forced to leave the pavement every step.

To the south, however, is as fine a piece of coast scenery as I ever saw. Great black chasms, huge black cliffs, rugged and over-hung gullies, natural arches, and deep green pools below them, almost too deep to let you see the gleam of sand among the darker weed : there are deep caves too. In one of these lives a tribe of gipsies. The men are *always* drunk, simply and truthfully always. From morning to evening the great villainous-looking fellows are either sleeping off the last debauch, or hulking about the cove " in the horrors." The cave is deep, high, and airy, and might be made comfortable enough. But they just live among heaped boulders, damp with continual droppings from above, with no more furniture than two or three tin pans, a truss of rotten straw, and a few ragged cloaks. In winter the surf bursts into the mouth and often forces them to abandon it.

An *émeute* of disappointed fishers was feared, and two ships of war are in the bay to render assistance to the municipal authorities. This is the ides ; and, to all intents and purposes, said ides are passed. Still there is a good deal of disturbance, many drunk men, and a double supply of police. I saw them sent for by some people and enter an inn, in a pretty good hurry : what it was for I do not know.

You would see by papa's letter about the carpenter who

fell off the staging: I don't think I was ever so much excited in my life. The man was back at his work, and I asked him how he was; but he was a Highlander, and—need I add it?—dickens a word could I understand of his answer. What is still worse, I find the people hereabout—that is to say, the Highlanders, not the northmen—don't understand *me*.

I have lost a shilling's worth of postage stamps, which has damped my ardour for buying big lots of 'em: I'll buy them one at a time as I want 'em for the future.

The Free Church minister and I got quite thick. He left last night about two in the morning, when I went to turn in. He gave me the enclosed.—I remain your affectionate son,

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

*Wick, September* 5, 1868. *Monday*

My dear Mamma,—This morning I got a delightful haul: your letter of the fourth (surely mis-dated); papa's of same day; Virgil's *Bucolics*, very thankfully received; and Aikman's *Annals*,* a precious and most acceptable donation, for which I tender my most ebullient thanksgivings. I almost forgot to drink my tea and eat mine egg.

It contains more detailed accounts than anything I ever saw, except Wodrow, without being so portentously tiresome and so desperately overborne with footnotes, proclamations, acts of Parliament, and citations as that last history.

I have been reading a good deal of Herbert. He's a clever and a devout cove; but in places awfully twaddley (if I may use the word). Oughtn't this to rejoice papa's heart—

> "Carve or discourse; do not a famine fear.
> Who carves is kind to two, who talks to all."

* Aikman's *Annals of the Persecution in Scotland.*

You understand? The "fearing a famine" is applied to people gulping down solid vivers without a word, as if the ten lean kine began to-morrow.

Do you remember condemning something of mine for being too obtrusively didactic? Listen to Herbert—

> "Is it not verse except enchanted groves
> And sudden arbours shadow coarse-spun lines?
> Must purling streams refresh a lover's loves?
> *Must all be veiled, while he that reads divines*
> *Catching the sense at two removes?*"

You see, "except" was used for "unless" before 1630.

*Tuesday.*—The riots were a hum. No more has been heard; and one of the war-steamers has deserted in disgust.

The *Moonstone* is frightfully interesting: isn't the detective prime? Don't say anything about the plot; for I have only read on to the end of Betteredge's narrative, so don't know anything about it yet.

I thought to have gone on to Thurso to-night, but the coach was full; so I go to-morrow instead.

To-day I had a grouse: great glorification.

There is a drunken brute in the house who disturbed my rest last night. He's a very respectable man in general, but when on the "spree" a most consummate fool. When he came in he stood on the top of the stairs and preached in the dark with great solemnity and no audience from 12 P.M. to half-past one. At last I opened my door. "Are we to have no sleep at all for that *drunken brute?*" I said. As I hoped, it had the desired effect. "Drunken brute!" he howled, in much indignation; then after a pause, in a voice of some contrition, "Well, if I am a drunken brute, it's only once in the twelve-month!" And that was the end of him; the insult rankled in his mind; and he retired to rest. He is a fish-curer, a man over fifty, and pretty rich too. He's as bad again to-day; but I'll be shot if he keeps me awake. I'll douse him with water if he makes a row.—Ever your affectionate son,

R. L. STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

The Macdonald father and son here mentioned were engineers attached to the Stevenson firm and in charge of the harbour works.

*Wick, September,* 1868. *Saturday,* 10 A.M.

My dear Mother,—The last two days have been dreadfully hard, and I was so tired in the evenings that I could not write. In fact, last night I went to sleep immediately after dinner, or very nearly so. My hours have been 10–2 and 3–7 out in the lighter or the small boat, in a long, heavy roll from the nor'-east. When the dog was taken out, he got awfully ill; one of the men, Geordie Grant by name and surname, followed *shoot* with considerable *éclat;* but, wonderful to relate! I kept well. My hands are skinned, blistered, discoloured, and engrained with tar, some of which latter has established itself under my nails in a position of such natural strength that it defies all my efforts to dislodge it. The worst work I had was when David (Macdonald's eldest) and I took the charge ourselves. He remained in the lighter to tighten or slacken the guys as we raised the pole towards the perpendicular, with two men. I was with four men in the boat. We dropped an anchor out a good bit, then tied a cord to the pole, took a turn round the sternmost thwart with it, and pulled on the anchor line. As the great, big, wet hawser came in it soaked you to the skin: I was the sternest (used, by way of variety, for sternmost) of the lot, and had to coil it—a work which involved, from *its* being so stiff and *your* being busy pulling with all your might, no little trouble and an extra ducking. We got it up; and, just as we were going to sing "Victory!" one of the guys slipped in, the pole tottered—went over on its side again like a shot, and behold the end of our labour.

You see, I have been roughing it; and though some parts of the letter may be neither very comprehensible nor very interesting to *you*, I think that perhaps it might amuse Willie Traquair who delights in all such dirty jobs.

The first day, I forgot to mention, was like midwinter for cold, and rained incessantly so hard that the livid white

of our cold-pinched faces wore a sort of inflamed rash on the windward side.

I am not a bit the worse of it, except fore-mentioned state of hands, a slight crick in my neck from the rain running down, and general stiffness from pulling, hauling, and tugging for dear life.

We have got double weights at the guys, and hope to get it up like a shot.

What fun you three must be having! I hope the cold don't disagree with you.—I remain, my dear mother, your affectionate son,

R. L. STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

The following will help the reader to understand the passage referring to this undertaking in Stevenson's biographical essay on his father, where he has told how in the end "the sea proved too strong for men's arts, and after expedients hitherto unthought of, and on a scale hyper-Cyclopean, the work must be deserted, and now stands a ruin in that bleak, God-forsaken bay." The Russels herein mentioned are the family of Sheriff Russel. The tombstone of Miss Sara Russel is to be seen in Wick cemetery.

*Pulteney, Wick, Sunday, September,* 1868

MY DEAR MOTHER,—Another storm: wind higher, rain thicker: the wind still rising as the night closes in and the sea slowly rising along with it; it looks like a three days' gale.

Last week has been a blank one: always too much sea.

I enjoyed myself very much last night at the R.'s. There was a little dancing, much singing and supper.

Are you not well that you do not write? I haven't heard from you for more than a fortnight.

The wind fell yesterday and rose again to-day; it is a dreadful evening; but the wind is keeping the sea down as yet. Of course, nothing more has been done to the poles; and I can't tell when I shall be able to leave, not for a fortnight yet, I fear, at the earliest, for the winds are persistent. Where's Murra? Is Cummy struck dumb about the boots? I wish you would get somebody to write an inter-

esting letter and say how you are, for you're on the broad of your back I see. There hath arrived an inroad of farmers to-night; and I go to avoid them to Macdonald if he's disengaged, to the Russels if not.

*Sunday* (*later*).—Storm without: wind and rain: a confused mass of wind-driven rain-squalls, wind-ragged mist, foam, spray, and great, grey waves. Of this hereafter; in the meantime let us follow the due course of historic narrative.

Seven P.M. found me at Breadalbane Terrace, clad in spotless blacks, white tie, shirt, et cætera, and finished off below with a pair of navvies' boots. How true that the devil is betrayed by his feet! A message to Cummy at last. Why, O treacherous woman! were my dress boots withheld?

Dramatis personæ: père Russel, amusing, long-winded, in many points like papa; mère Russel, nice, delicate, likes hymns, knew Aunt Margaret ('t'ould man knew Uncle Alan); fille Russel, nommée Sara (no h), rather nice, lights up well, good voice, *interested* face; Miss L., nice also, washed out a little, and, I think, a trifle sentimental; fils Russel, in a Leith office, smart, full of happy epithet, amusing. They are very nice and very kind, asked me to come back—"any night you feel dull: and any night doesn't mean no night: we'll be so glad to see you." *C'est la mère qui parle.*

I was back there again to-night. There was hymn-singing, and general religious controversy till eight, after which talk was secular. Mrs. Sutherland was deeply distressed about the boot business. She consoled me by saying that many would be glad to have such feet whatever shoes they had on. Unfortunately, fishers and seafaring men are too facile to be compared with! This looks like enjoyment! better speck than Anster.

I have done with frivolity. This morning I was awakened by Mrs. Sutherland at the door. "There's a ship ashore at Shaltigoe!" As my senses slowly flooded, I heard the whistling and the roaring of wind, and the lashing of gust-blown and uncertain flaws of rain. I got up,

dressed, and went out. The mizzled sky and rain blinded you.

C D is the new pier.
A the schooner ashore. B the salmon house.

She was a Norwegian: coming in she saw our first gauge-pole, standing at point E. Norse skipper thought it was a sunk smack, and dropped his anchor in full drift of sea: chain broke: schooner came ashore. Insured: laden with wood: skipper owner of vessel and cargo: bottom out.

I was in a great fright at first lest we should be liable; but it seems that's all right.

Some of the waves were twenty feet high. The spray rose eighty feet at the new pier. Some wood has come ashore, and the roadway seems carried away. There is something fishy at the far end where the cross wall is building; but till we are able to get along, all speculation is vain.

I am so sleepy I am writing nonsense.

I stood a long while on the cope watching the sea below me; I hear its dull, monotonous roar at this moment below the shrieking of the wind; and there came ever recurring to my mind the verse I am so fond of:—

> "But yet the Lord that is on high
> Is more of might by far
> Than noise of many waters is
> Or great sea-billows are."

The thunder at the wall when it first struck—the rush along ever growing higher—the great jet of snow-white

spray some forty feet above you—and the " noise of many waters," the roar, the hiss, the " shrieking " among the shingle as it fell head over heels at your feet. I watched if it threw the big stones at the wall; but it never moved them.

*Monday*.—The end of the work displays gaps, cairns of ten ton blocks, stones torn from their places and turned right round. The damage above water is comparatively little: what there may be below, *on ne sait pas encore*. The roadway is torn away, cross-heads, broken planks tossed here and there, planks gnawn and mumbled as if a starved bear had been trying to eat them, planks with spales lifted from them as if they had been dressed with a rugged plane, one pile swaying to and fro clear of the bottom, the rails in one place sunk a foot at least. This was not a great storm, the waves were light and short. Yet when we were standing at the office, I felt the ground beneath me *quail* as a huge roller thundered on the work at the last year's cross wall.

How could *noster amicus Q. maximus* appreciate a storm at Wick? It requires a little of the artistic temperament, of which Mr. T. S.,* C. E., possesses some, whatever he may say. I can't look at it practically however: that will come, I suppose, like grey hair or coffin nails.

Our pole is snapped: a fortnight's work and the loss of the Norse schooner all for nothing!—except experience and dirty clothes.—Your affectionate son,

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

*Pulteney Hotel,*
*Friday, Oct. 2nd,* 1868, 11.30 P.M.

My dear Mother,—" Ha my prophetic soul! " how true thou prophesied! or prophesiedest; but the latter is bad orthography and spoils the Alexandrine (*Nota Bene:* papa will again object to poetry). I knew you were on the

* Thomas Stevenson.

broad of your back. Second withering blast of prophesy :—*you have been at church !* I am glad you are better.

To desert these windy and perilous heights of prophesy and grandeur, let me court the humdrum muse of epistolary diction : you see I am still a little Poped ; indeed he fairly *pooped* me !

Miss J.—J ? Where are thy thoughts ?—Miss Jamie Jamieson, to be sure !

On Wednesday the Russels sent for me to come at eight. Wondering I went. (Stay—a little gossip first. . . .* Enough—more than enough of gossip ! So go on.) Forma and Latta (forma translates nicely : supposing an elision thus : " Pulcherrima forma," which papa will translate) Miss Coxe, Adams et ego were to go a walk " per amica silentia lunæ, under the friendly silence of the moon "—ahem ! Virgil ! to quote Pangloss—to the Old Man of Wick, a ruinous Tower on a neck of beetling cliff, with two roaring chasms of tarn and a wild coast of crag and cave and boulder trending away on either hand (papa here once more condemns Tatleranean tendency and deplores same), I entertained Sara and the latter woman : Adams, Miss Coxe. Of course on occasions, it faded into an insipid party of five ; but that was the usual arrangement. We sat down outside the tower and watched " The moon-chased shadows " fly across the wide white fields of tarn. The latter, who is very romantic and likes Byron, Scott, dim moonlight and faded lovers, found her heart too full for words and retired to a far pinnacle, like Elijah the Tishbite, alone.

I was so much amused at Mrs. Russel (who is a very nice body, albeit a Paget of the Pagets and the real Pagets, whence comes the tuftism) ; she was so frightened ; we were to keep away from the rocks ; we were to do this ; I was to put on her shawl (which, however, I secreted in the lobby) ; we were to do that ; but above all, was she distressed over a portion of Sara's attire,—a garment called, I am told, a p-t-c-t. This part of her apparel had been scrupulously cleansed for Germanee ! and they feared that,

* Two lines were here erased by his mother.

passing through the mire, it might become soiled. In my eagerness to oblige, not only did I become bound to wear the shawl and become answerable for the necks and future health of the whole party, but I actually offered a guarantee for the safe return of the said portion of attire or wearing apparel, or the aforesaid garment, namely the p-t-c-t: whereat, *on rit*. We had a very pleasant walk.

So you left Swanston yesterday. Heu scelerata jacet sedes in Heriot Row! (How classical I have become—haven't I?) As this substitution makes the line a foot too short, you will be pleased to proceed on the "Murray of Murrays Ha-Ha" principle, and say "Rew-ow," which makes it correct. The line is the beginning of Ovid's description of Tartarus; so it's rather hard on "sweet seventeen" after all. And left it yesterday, while I was waiting for Mr. Robieson, absent foreman-joiner. Well! well! troubles never come singly!

To-day the two poles were put up; the levels taken; the gauges up-fixed; and, with these hands, I cut the paper strips! To-morrow and Monday our men take the observations.

David MacD. and I pulled out in the boat to the bay's mouth when the men were done. The moon rose, red and "redeeclous magnified" from the breast of the sea. It was a lovely night. A lugger, out for the night's fishing, passed close by; it looked tall, filmy and unnatural in the dim light; we could only see the outline. At last, it drove "betwixt the moon and us"—ahem! Coleridge! (Pangloss again)—you would have been delighted. We pulled back, moored the boat at the outmost ladder and walked in along the staging. Suddenly D. M. stopped; I thought he looked livid about the gills. "The dog!" he gasped.

"What about the dog? The dog knows *you?*" said I, a little chilled.

"I don't know that though," he said; "and even when he wasn't so fierce, I seen * him set on a young man that came down with me."

* As the old cock, etc. "Le coq chanter." [Author's note.]

Didn't I feel happy! we armed ourselves with stones and very cautiously crept down the staging, trying to whistle and look calm.

After all, we did not see him.

Mrs. Wemyss and her son called here to-day. I must go out either on Saturday or Monday, whichever day I can get the time. For I am to leave on Toosda and chaperone Forma and Latta down; that's rather a spec, isn't it?

This here letter has been intended to be very witty, very amusing, very romantic, very entertaining in general. The only thing that broke down was the gossip. I had an awful vision of parental brows in awful anger bent; and parental lips saying: "Put nothing in black and white." Besides, what it seems but little malicious to say, seems perfectly diabolical on paper—the mean, low hits that flourish in the bitter satire of the satanic Byron. But isn't it true about Southey for all that. "Immortal Hero!"—this is—". . . for ever reign. . . . Since startled metre fled before thy face!"

I could not write to ——; her name is so hard to spell.

I remain,

Ever your aff't. son,

R. L. STEVENSON.

"Parcite, ab urbe venit, jam parcite epistolae, Robert." Another hexameter neatly altered, if papa could only scan, he would admire it.

When your letter came I said, "Demme!" followin' my present classical bent.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

I omit the letters of 1869, which describe at great length, and not very interestingly, a summer trip on board the lighthouse steamer to the Orkneys, Shetlands, and the Fair Isle. The following of 1870, I give (with the consent of the lady who figures as a youthful character in the narrative) both for the sake of its lively social sketches—including that of the able painter and singular personage, the late Sam Bough,—and because it is dated from

the Isle of Earraid off the Ross of Mull, celebrated alike in *Kidnapped* and in the essay *Memoirs of an Islet.*

*Earraid, Thursday, August 5th,* 1870

My dear Mother,—I have so much to say, that needs must I take a large sheet ; for the note-paper brings with it a chilling brevity of style. Indeed, I think pleasant writing is proportional to the size of the material you write withal.

From Edinburgh to Greenock, I had the ex-secretary of the E. U. Conservative Club, Murdoch. At Greenock I spent a dismal evening, though I found a pretty walk. Next day on board the *Iona*, I had Maggie Thomson to Tarbet ; Craig, a well-read, pleasant medical, to Ardrishaig ; and Professor, Mrs., and all the little Fleeming Jenkinses to Oban.

At Oban, that night, it was delicious. Mr. Stephenson's yacht lay in the bay, and a splendid band on board played delightfully. The waters of the bay were as smooth as a mill-pond ; and, in the dusk, the black shadows of the hills stretched across to our very feet and the lights were reflected in long lines. At intervals, blue lights were burned on the water : and rockets were sent up. Sometimes great stars of clear fire fell from them, until the bay received and quenched them. I hired a boat and skulled round the yacht in the dark. When I came in, a very pleasant Englishman on the steps fell into talk with me, till it was time to go to bed.

Next morning I slept on or I should have gone to Glencoe. As it was, it was blazing hot ; so I hired a boat, pulled all forenoon along the coast and had a delicious bathe on the beautiful white beach. Coming home, I *cotogai'd* my Englishman, lunched alongside of him and his sister, and took a walk with him in the afternoon, during which I find that he was travelling with a servant, kept horses, *et cetera*. At dinner he wished me to sit beside him and his sister ; but there was no room. When he came out he told me why he was so *empressé* on this point. He had found out my name, and that I was connected with lighthouses, and his sister wished to know if I were any relative of the Stevenson in

Ballantyne's *Lighthouse*. All evening, he, his sister, I, and Mr. Hargrove, of Hargrove and Fowler, sate in front of the hotel. I asked Mr. H. if he knew who my friend was. "Yes," he said; "I never met him before: but my partner knows him. He is a man of old family; and the solicitor of highest standing about Sheffield." At night, he said, "Now if you're down in my neighbourhood, you must pay me a visit. I am very fond of young men about me; and I should like a visit from you very much. I can take you through any factory in Sheffield and I'll drive you all about the *Dookeries*." He then wrote me down his address; and we parted huge friends, he still keeping me up to visiting him.

Hitherto, I had enjoyed myself amazingly; but to-day has been the crown. In the morning I met Bough on board, with whom I am both surprised and delighted. He and I have read the same books, and discuss Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Fletcher, Webster, and all the old authors. He can quote verses by the page, and has really a very pretty literary taste. Altogether, with all his roughness and buffoonery, a more pleasant, clever fellow you may seldom see. I was very much surprised with him; and he with me. "Where the devil did you read all these books?" says he; and in my heart, I echo the question. One amusing thing I must say. We were both talking about travelling; and I said I was so fond of travelling alone, from the people one met and grew friendly with. "Ah," says he, "but you've such a pleasant manner, you know—quite captivated my old woman, you did—she couldn't talk of anything else." Here was a compliment, even in Sam Bough's sneering tones, that rather tickled my vanity; and really, my social successes of the last few days, the best of which is yet to come, are enough to turn anybody's head. To continue, after a little go in with Samuel, he going up on the bridge, I looked about me to see who there was; and mine eye lighted on two girls, one of whom was sweet and pretty, talking to an old gentleman. "*Eh bien*," says I to myself, "that seems the best investment on board." So I sidled up to the old gentleman, got into

conversation with him and so with the damsel; and thereupon, having used the patriarch as a ladder, I kicked him down behind me. Who should my damsel prove, but Amy Sinclair, daughter of Sir Tollemache. She certainly was the simplest, most naïve specimen of girlhood ever I saw. By getting brandy and biscuit and generally coaching up her cousin, who was sick, I ingratiated myself; and so kept her the whole way to Iona, taking her into the cave at Staffa and generally making myself as gallant as possible. I was never so much pleased with anything in my life, as her amusing absence of *mauvaise honte:* she was so sorry I wasn't going on to Oban again: didn't know how she could have enjoyed herself if I hadn't been there; and was so sorry we hadn't met on the Crinan. When we came back from Staffa, she and her aunt went down to have lunch; and a minute after up comes Miss Amy to ask me if I wouldn't think better of it, and take some lunch with them. I couldn't resist that, of course, so down I went; and there she displayed the full extent of her innocence. I must be sure to come to Thurso Castle the next time I was in Caithness, and Upper Norwood (whence she would take me all over the Crystal Palace) when I was near London; and (most complete of all) she offered to call on us in Edinburgh. Wasn't it delicious?—she is a girl of sixteen or seventeen, too, and the latter I think. I never yet saw a girl so innocent and fresh, so perfectly modest without the least trace of prudery.

Coming off Staffa, Sam Bough, who had been in huge force the whole time, drawing in Miss Amy's sketch-book and making himself agreeable or otherwise to everybody, pointed me out to a parson and said, "That's him." This was Alexander Ross and his wife.

The last stage of the steamer now approached, Miss Amy and I lamenting pathetically that Iona was so near. "People meet in this way," quoth she, "and then lose sight of one another so soon." We all landed together, Bough and I and the Rosses with our baggage; and went together over the ruins. I was here left with the cousin and the aunt, during which I learned that said cousin sees

me *every Sunday* in St. Stephen's. Oho ! thought I, at the " every." The aunt was very anxious to know who that strange, wild man was (didn't I wish Samuel in Tophet !). Of course, in reply, I drew it strong about eccentric genius and my never having known him before, and a good deal that was perhaps " strained to the extremest limit of the fact."

The steamer left, and Miss Amy and her cousin waved their handkerchiefs, until my arm in answering them was nearly broken. I believe women's arms must be better made for this exercise : mine ache still ; and I regretted at the time that the handkerchief had seen service. Altogether, however, I was left in a pleasant frame of mind.

Being thus left alone, Bough, I, the Rosses, Professor Blackie, and an Englishman called M——, these people were going to remain the night, except the Professor, who is resident there at present. They were going to dine *en compagnie* and wished us to join the party ; but we had already committed ourselves by mistake to the wrong hotel, and besides, we wished to be off as soon as wind and time were against us to Earraid. We went up ; Bough selected a place for sketching and blocked in the sketch for Mrs. R. ; and we all talked together. Bough told us his family history and a lot of strange things about old Cumberland life ; among others, how he had known " John Peel " of pleasant memory in song, and of how that worthy hunted. At five, down we got to the Argyll Hotel, and wait dinner. Broth—" nice broth "—fresh herrings, and fowl had been promised. At 5.50, I get the shovel and tongs and drum them at the stairhead till a response comes from below that the nice broth is at hand. I boast of my engineering, and Bough compares me to the Abbott of Arbroath who originated the Inchcape Bell. At last, in comes the tureen and the hand-maid lifts the cover. " Rice soup ! " I yell ; " O no ! none o' that for me ! "—" Yes," says Bough savagely ; " but Miss Amy didn't take *me* downstairs to eat salmon." Accordingly he is helped. How his face fell. " I imagine myself in the accident ward of the Infirmary," quoth he. It was, purely and simply, rice and

water. After this, we have another weary pause, and then herrings in a state of mash and potatoes like iron. "Send the potatoes out to Prussia for grape-shot," was the suggestion. I dined off broken herrings and dry bread. At last "the supreme moment comes," and the fowl in a lordly dish is carried in. On the cover being raised, there is something so forlorn and miserable about the aspect of the animal that we both roar with laughter. Then Bough, taking up knife and fork, turns the "swarry" over and over, shaking doubtfully his head. "There's an aspect of quiet resistance about the beggar," says he, "that looks bad." However, to work he falls until the sweat stands on his brow and a dismembered leg falls, dull and leaden-like, on to my dish. To eat it was simply impossible. I did not know before that flesh could be so tough. "The strongest jaws in England," says Bough piteously, harpooning his dry morsel, "couldn't eat this leg in less than twelve hours." Nothing for it now, but to order boat and bill. "That fowl," says Bough to the landlady, "is of a breed I know. I knew the cut of its jib whenever it was put down. That was the grandmother of the cock that frightened Peter."—"I thought it was a historical animal," says I. "What a shame to kill it. It's as bad as eating Whittington's cat or the Dog of Montargis."—"Na—na, it's no' so old," says the landlady, "but it eats hard."—"Eats!" I cry, "where do you find that? Very little of that verb with us." So with more raillery, we pay six shillings for our festival and run over to Earraid, shaking the dust of the Argyll Hotel from off our feet.

I can write no more just now, and I hope you will be able to decipher so much, for it contains matter. Really, the whole of yesterday's work would do in a novel without one little bit of embellishment; and, indeed, few novels are so amusing. Bough, Miss Amy, Mrs. Ross, Blackie, M—— the parson—all these were such distinct characters, the incidents were so entertaining, and the scenery so fine, that the whole would have made a novelist's fortune.

My dear Father,—No landing to-day, as the sea runs

high on the rock. They are at the second course of the first story on the rock. I have as yet had no time here ; so this is α and ω of my business news.—Your affectionate son,

R. L. STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Churchill Babington

This is addressed to a favourite cousin of the Balfour clan, married to a Cambridge colleague of mine, Professor Churchill Babington of learned and amiable memory, whose home was at the college living of Cockfield near Bury St. Edmunds. Here Stevenson had visited them in the previous year. Mrs. Hutchinson is, of course, Lucy Hutchinson's famous *Life* of her husband, the regicide.

[*Swanston Cottage, Lothianburn, Summer*, 1871]

MY DEAR MAUD,—If you have forgotten the handwriting —as is like enough—you will find the name of a former correspondent (don't know how to spell that word) at the end. I have begun to write to you before now, but always stuck somehow, and left it to drown in a drawerful of like fiascos. This time I am determined to carry through, though I have nothing specially to say.

We look fairly like summer this morning ; the trees are blackening out of their spring greens ; the warmer suns have melted the hoarfrost of daisies of the paddock ; and the blackbird, I fear, already beginning to " stint his pipe of mellower days "—which is very apposite (I can't spell anything to-day—*one* p or *two ?*) and pretty. All the same, we have been having shocking weather—cold winds and grey skies.

I have been reading heaps of nice books ; but I can't go back so far. I am reading Clarendon's *Hist. Rebell.* at present, with which I am more pleased than I expected, which is saying a good deal. It is a pet idea of mine that one gets more real truth out of one avowed partisan than out of a dozen of your sham impartialists—wolves in sheep's clothing—simpering honesty as they suppress documents. After all, what one wants to know is not what people did, but why they did it—or rather, why they

*thought* they did it ; and to learn that, you should go to the men themselves. Their very falsehood is often more than another man's truth.

I have possessed myself of Mrs. Hutchinson, which, of course, I admire, etc. But is there not an irritating deliberation and correctness about her and everybody connected with her ? If she would only write bad grammar, or forget to finish a sentence, or do something or other that looks fallible, it would be a relief. I sometimes wish the old Colonel had got drunk and beaten her, in the bitterness of my spirit. I know I felt a weight taken off my heart when I heard he was extravagant. It is quite possible to be too good for this evil world ; and unquestionably, Mrs. Hutchinson was. The way in which she talks of herself makes one's blood run cold. There ! I am glad to have got that out—but don't say it to anybody—seal of secrecy.

Please tell Mr. Babington that I have never forgotten one of his drawings—a Rubens, I think—a woman holding up a model ship. That woman had more life in her than ninety per cent. of the lame humans that you see crippling about this earth.

By the way, that is a feature in art which seems to have come in with the Italians. Your old Greek statues have scarce enough vitality in them to keep their monstrous bodies fresh withal. A shrewd country attorney, in a turned white neckcloth and rusty blacks, would just take one of these Agamemnons and Ajaxes quietly by his beautiful, strong arm, trot the unresisting statue down a little gallery of legal shams, and turn the poor fellow out at the other end, " naked, as from the earth he came." There is more latent life, more of the coiled spring in the sleeping dog, about a recumbent figure of Michael Angelo's than about the most excited of Greek statues. The very marble seems to wrinkle with a wild energy that we never feel except in dreams.

I think this letter has turned into a sermon, but I had nothing interesting to talk about.

I do wish you and Mr. Babington would think better of it and come north this summer. We should be so glad to

see you both. *Do* reconsider it.—Believe me, my dear Maud, ever your most affectionate cousin,

LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To ALISON CUNNINGHAM

The following is the first which has been preserved of many letters to the admirable nurse whose care, during his ailing childhood, had done so much both to preserve Stevenson's life and awaken his love of tales and poetry, and of whom until his death he thought with the utmost constancy of affection. The letter bears no sign of date or place, but by the handwriting would seem to belong to this year :—

[1871] ?

MY DEAR CUMMY,—I was greatly pleased by your letter in many ways. Of course, I was glad to hear from you ; you know you and I have so many old stories between us, that even if there was nothing else, even if there was not a very sincere respect and affection, we should always be glad to pass a nod. I say, " even if there was not." But you know right well there is. Do not suppose that I shall ever forget those long, bitter nights, when I coughed and coughed and was so unhappy, and you were so patient and loving with a poor, sick child. Indeed, Cummy, I wish I might become a man worth talking of, if it were only that you should not have thrown away your pains.

Happily, it is not the result of our acts that makes them brave and noble, but the acts themselves and the unselfish love that moved us to do them. " Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these." My dear old nurse, and you know there is nothing a man can say nearer his heart except his mother or his wife—my dear old nurse, God will make good to you all the good that you have done, and mercifully forgive you all the evil. And next time when the spring comes round, and everything is beginning once again, if you should happen to think that you might have had a child of your own, and that it was hard you should have spent so many years taking care of some one else's prodigal, just you think this—you have been for a great deal in my life ; you have made much that there is

in me, just as surely as if you had conceived me ; and there are sons who are more ungrateful to their own mothers than I am to you. For I am not ungrateful, my dear Cummy, and it is with a very sincere emotion that I write myself your little boy,

LOUIS.

## To Charles Baxter

After a winter of troubled health, Stevenson had gone to Dunblane for a change in early spring ; and thence writes to his college companion and lifelong friend, Mr. Charles Baxter :—

*Dunblane, Friday, 5th March,* 1872

MY DEAR BAXTER,—By the date you may perhaps understand the purport of my letter without any words wasted about the matter. I cannot walk with you to-morrow and you must not expect me. I came yesterday afternoon to Bridge of Allan, and have been very happy ever since, as every place is sanctified by the eighth sense, Memory. I walked up here this morning (three miles, *tu-dieu !* a good stretch for me), and passed one of my favourite places in the world, and one that I very much affect in spirit when the body is tied down and brought immovably to anchor on a sickbed. It is a meadow and bank on a corner on the river, and is connected in my mind inseparably with Virgil's *Eclogues*. *Hic corulis mistos inter consedimus ulmos*, or something very like that, the passage begins (only I know my short-winded Latinity must have come to grief over even this much of quotation) ; and here, to a wish, is just such a cavern as Menalcas might shelter himself withal from the bright noon, and, with his lips curled backward, pipe himself blue in the face, while *Messieurs les Arcadiens* would roll out those cloying hexameters that sing themselves in one's mouth to such a curious lilting chant.

In such weather one has the bird's need to whistle ; and I, who am specially incompetent in this art, must content myself by chattering away to you on this bit of paper. All the way along I was thanking God that he had made me and the birds and everything just as they are and not otherwise,

for although there was no sun, the air was so thrilled with robins and blackbirds that it made the heart tremble with joy, and the leaves are far enough forward on the underwood to give a fine promise for the future. Even myself, as I say, I would not have had changed in one *iota* this forenoon, in spite of all my idleness and Guthrie's lost paper, which is ever present with me—a horrible phantom.

No one can be alone at home or in a quite new place. Memory and you must go hand in hand with (at least) decent weather if you wish to cook up a proper dish of solitude. It is in these little flights of mine that I get more pleasure than in anything else. Now, at present, I am supremely uneasy and restless—almost to the extent of pain ; but O ! how I enjoy it, and how I *shall* enjoy it afterwards (please God), if I get years enough allotted to me for the thing to ripen in. When I am a very old and very respectable citizen with white hair and bland manners and a gold watch, I shall hear three crows cawing in my heart, as I heard them this morning : I vote for old age and eighty years of retrospect. Yet, after all, I dare say, a short shrift and a nice green grave are about as desirable.

Poor devil ! how I am wearying you ! Cheer up. Two pages more, and my letter reaches its term, for I have no more paper. What delightful things inns and waiters and bagmen are ! If we didn't travel now and then, we should forget what the feeling of life is. The very cushion of a railway carriage—" the things restorative to the touch." I can't write, confound it ! That's because I am so tired with my walk. . . . Believe me, ever your affectionate friend,

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Charles Baxter

The Spec. is, of course, the famous and historical debating society (the Speculative Society) of Edinburgh University, to which Stevenson had been elected on the strength of his conversational powers, and to whose meetings he contributed several essays.

*Dunblane, Tuesday, 9th April,* 1872

My dear Baxter,—I don't know what you mean. I know nothing about the Standing Committee of the Spec., did not know that such a body existed, and even if it doth exist, must sadly repudiate all association with such "goodly fellowship." I am a "Rural Voluptuary" at present. *That* is what is the matter with me. The Spec. may go whistle. As for "C. Baxter, Esq.," who is he? "One Baxter, or Bagster, a secretary," I say to mine acquaintance, "is at present disquieting my leisure with certain illegal, uncharitable, unchristian, and unconstitutional documents called *Business Letters: The affair is in the hands of the Police.*" Do you hear *that*, you evil-doer? Sending business letters is surely a far more hateful and slimy degree of wickedness than sending threatening letters; the man who throws grenades and torpedoes is less malicious; the Devil in red-hot hell rubs his hands with glee as he reckons up the number that go forth spreading pain and anxiety with each delivery of the post.

I have been walking to-day by a colonnade of beeches along the brawling Allan. My character for sanity is quite gone, seeing that I cheered my lonely way with the following, in a triumphant chaunt: "Thank God for the grass, and the fir-trees, and the crows, and the sheep, and the sunshine, and the shadows of the fir-trees." I hold that he is a poor mean devil who can walk alone, in such a place and in such weather, and doesn't set up his lungs and cry back to the birds and the river. Follow, follow, follow me. Come hither, come hither, come hither—here shall you see—no enemy—except a very slight remnant of winter and its rough weather. My bedroom, when I awoke this morning, was full of bird-songs, which is the greatest pleasure in life. Come hither, come hither, come hither, and when you come bring the third part of the *Earthly Paradise;* you can get it for me in Elliot's for two and tenpence (2s. 10d.) (*business habits*). Also bring an ounce of honeydew from Wilson's.

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

In the previous year, 1871, it had become apparent that Stevenson was neither fitted by bodily health nor by inclination for the family profession of civil engineer. Accordingly his summer excursions were no longer to the harbour works and lighthouses of Scotland, but to the ordinary scenes of holiday travel abroad.

*Brussels, Thursday, 25th July,* 1872

My dear Mother,—I am here at last, sitting in my room, without coat or waistcoat, and with both window and door open, and yet perspiring like a terra-cotta jug or a Gruyère cheese.

We had a very good passage, which we certainly deserved, in compensation for having to sleep on the cabin floor, and finding absolutely nothing fit for human food in the whole filthy embarkation. We made up for lost time by sleeping on deck a good part of the forenoon. When I woke, Simpson was still sleeping the sleep of the just, on a coil of ropes and (as appeared afterwards) his own hat; so I got a bottle of Bass and a pipe and laid hold of an old Frenchman of somewhat filthy aspect (*fiat experimentum in corpore vili*) to try my French upon. I made very heavy weather of it. The Frenchman had a very pretty young wife; but my French always deserted me entirely when I had to answer her, and so she soon drew away and left me to her lord, who talked of French politics, Africa, and domestic economy with great vivacity. From Ostend a smoking-hot journey to Brussels. At Brussels we went off after dinner to the Parc. If any person wants to be happy, I should advise the Parc. You sit drinking iced drinks and smoking penny cigars under great old trees. The band place, covered walks, etc., are all lit up. And you can't fancy how beautiful was the contrast of the great masses of lamplit foliage and the dark sapphire night sky with just one blue star set overhead in the middle of the largest patch. In the dark walks, too, there are crowds of people whose faces you cannot see, and here and there a colossal white statue at the corner of an alley that gives the place a nice, *artificial*, eighteenth-century sentiment. There was a good

deal of summer lightning blinking overhead, and the black avenues and white statues leapt out every minute into short-lived distinctness.

I get up to add one thing more. There is in the hotel a boy in whom I take the deepest interest. I cannot tell you his age, but the very first time I saw him (when I was at dinner yesterday) I was very much struck with his appearance. There is something very leonine in his face, with a dash of the negro especially, if I remember aright, in the mouth. He has a great quantity of dark hair, curling in great rolls, not in little corkscrews, and a pair of large, dark, and very steady, bold, bright eyes. His manners are those of a prince. I felt like an overgrown ploughboy beside him. He speaks English perfectly, but with, I think, sufficient foreign accent to stamp him as a Russian, especially when his manners are taken into account. I don't think I ever saw any one who looked like a hero before. After breakfast this morning, I was talking to him in the court, when he mentioned casually that he had caught a snake in the Riesengebirge. "I have it here," he said; "would you like to see it?" I said yes; and putting his hand into his breast-pocket, he drew forth not a dried serpent skin, but the head and neck of the reptile writhing and shooting out its horrible tongue in my face. You may conceive what a fright I got. I send off this single sheet just now in order to let you know I am safe across; but you must not expect letters often.

R. L. Stevenson.

*P.S.*—The snake was about a yard long, but harmless, and now, he says, quite tame.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

*Monday, 29th July,* 1872
*Hotel Landsberg, Frankfurt*

My dear Mamma,—I think I shall get on pretty well with German. When I am not nervous, I can generally ask for anything I want, altho' it is indeed improbable that

I shall be able to understand the answer. As for a conversation, as most gentlemen understand French tho' they do not speak it, I can get on wonderfully well, eking out with it whenever my German runs dry. The difficulty here also, lies in what *they* say. In Frankfurt they pronounce very badly. This I was charmed to learn from a gentleman whom I met last night, and who, besides this comfortable information, gave me the greatest compliment I think I ever received—he took me for a Frenchman. You will not be surprised to learn, after this, that he himself was not de première force in French, and indeed had to fall back on Latin more than once in the course of our talk.

Last night, I met with rather an amusing adventurette. Seeing a church door open, I went in and was led by most importunate finger-bills up a long stair to the top of the tower. The father, smoking at the door, the mother and three daughters received me as if I was a friend of the family and had come in for an evening visit. The youngest daughter (about 13, I suppose, and a pretty little girl) had been learning English at the school, and was anxious to play it off upon a real, veritable Englander ; so we had a long talk and I was shown photographs, etc., Marie and I talking and the others looking on with evident delight at having such a linguist in the family. As all my remarks were duly translated and communicated to the rest, it was quite a good German lesson. There was only one contretemps during the whole interview—the arrival of another visitor in the shape of (surely) the last of God's creatures, a wood-worm of the most unnatural and hideous appearance with one great striped horn sticking out of his nose like a boltsprit. If there are many wood-worms in Germany, I shall come home. The most courageous men in the world must be entomologists. I had rather be a lion-tamer.

I am waiting Simpson's arrival with impatience, as I have not heard from home for so long, and yet have not so much as an envelope to show in evidence at the Post Office.

To-day, I got rather a curiosity—*Lieder und Balladen von Robert Burns*, translated by one Silbergleit, and not so ill

done either. Armed with which, I had a swim in the Main and then bread and cheese and Bavarian beer in a sort of café, or at least the German substitute for a café ; but what a falling off after the heavenly forenoons in Brussels !

I have bought a Meerschaum out of local sentiment and am now very low and nervous about the bargain, having paid dearer than I should in England and got a worse article, if I can form a judgment.

*Tuesday*.—Only one letter ; and that from my father and more technical than words can express. It contains however an account of the weather with you, that made both Simpson and me dance upon the streets. Compare this with what you have heard of from me and the newspaper slips.

My being taken for a Frenchman is no chance occurrence, and does not depend, alas ! upon my admirable accent. Four of five people here have already spotted me as sich and the most of these were people who could speak no French at all : very strange.

Do write some more, somebody. To-morrow I expect I shall go into lodgings as this Hotel work makes the money disappear like butter in a furnace.

Meanwhile believe me,

Ever your afft. son
R. L. Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

*Hotel Landsberg, Thursday, 1st August, 1872*

. . . Yesterday I walked to Eckenheim, a village a little way out of Frankfurt, and turned into the alehouse. In the room, which was just such as it would have been in Scotland, were the landlady, two neighbours, and an old peasant eating raw sausage at the far end. I soon got into conversation ; and was astonished when the landlady, having asked whether I were an Englishman, and received an answer in the affirmative, proceeded to inquire further whether I were not also a Scotchman. It turned out that a

Scotch doctor—a professor—a poet—who wrote books—*gross wie das*—had come nearly every day out of Frankfurt to the *Eckenheimer Wirthschaft*, and had left behind him a most savoury memory in the hearts of all its customers. One man ran out to find his name for me, and returned with the news that it was *Cobie* (Scobie I suspect); and during his absence the rest were pouring into my ears the fame and acquirements of my countryman. He was, in some undecipherable manner, connected with the Queen of England and one of the Princesses. He had been in Turkey, and had there married a wife of immense wealth. They could find apparently no measure adequate to express the size of his books. In one way or another, he had amassed a princely fortune, and had apparently only one sorrow, his daughter to wit, who had absconded into a *Kloster*, with a considerable slice of the mother's *Geld*. I told them we had no Klosters in Scotland, with a certain feeling of superiority. No more had they, I was told—"*Hier ist unser Kloster!*" and the speaker motioned with both arms round the taproom. Although the first torrent was exhausted, yet the Doctor came up again in all sorts of ways, and with or without occasion, throughout the whole interview; as, for example, when one man, taking his pipe out of his mouth and shaking his head, remarked *apropos* of nothing and with almost defiant conviction, "*Er war ein feiner Mann, der Herr Doctor*," and was answered by another with "*Yaw, yaw, und trank immer rothen Wein*."

Setting aside the Doctor, who had evidently turned the brains of the entire village, they were intelligent people. One thing in particular struck me, their honesty in admitting that here they spoke bad German, and advising me to go to Coburg or Leipsic for German.—"*Sie sprechen da rein*" (clean), said one; and they all nodded their heads together like so many mandarins, and repeated *rein, so rein* in chorus.

Of course we got upon Scotland. The hostess said, "*Die Schottländer trinken gern Schnapps*," which may be freely translated, "Scotchmen are horrid fond of whisky." It was impossible, of course, to combat such a truism; and

so I proceeded to explain the construction of toddy, interrupted by a cry of horror when I mentioned the *hot* water; and thence, as I find is always the case, to the most ghastly romancing about Scottish scenery and manners, the Highland dress, and everything national or local that I could lay my hands upon. Now that I have got my German Burns, I lean a good deal upon him for opening a conversation, and read a few translations to every yawning audience that I can gather. I am grown most insufferably national, you see. I fancy it is a punishment for my want of it at ordinary times. Now, what do you think, there was a waiter in this very hotel, but, alas! he is now gone, who sang (from morning to night, as my informant said with a shrug at the recollection) what but *'s ist lange her*, the German version of Auld Lang Syne; so you see, madame, the finest lyric ever written *will* make its way out of whatsoever corner of patois it found its birth in.

"Mein Herz ist im Hochland, mein Herz ist nicht hier,
Mein Herz ist im Hochland im grünen Revier.
Im grünen Reviere zu jagen das Reh;
Mein Herz ist im Hochland, wo immer ich geh."

I don't think I need translate that for you.

There is one thing that burthens me a good deal in my patriotic garrulage, and that is the black ignorance in which I grope about everything, as, for example, when I gave yesterday a full and, I fancy, a startlingly incorrect account of Scotch education to a very stolid German on a garden bench; he sat and perspired under it, however, with much composure. I am generally glad enough to fall back again, after these political interludes, upon Burns, toddy, and the Highlands.

I go every night to the theatre, except when there is no opera. I cannot stand a play yet; but I am already very much improved, and can understand a good deal of what goes on.

*Friday, August* 2, 1872.—In the evening, at the theatre, I had a great laugh. Lord Allcash in *Fra Diavolo*, with his white hat, red guide-books, and bad German, was the

*pièce-de-résistance* from a humorous point of view; and I had the satisfaction of knowing that in my own small way I could minister the same amusement whenever I chose to open my mouth.

I am just going off to do some German with Simpson.—Your affectionate son,

R. L. STEVENSON.

## To Thomas Stevenson

*Frankfurt, Rosengasse* 13, *August* 4, 1872

MY DEAR FATHER,—You will perceive by the head of this page that we have at last got into lodgings, and powerfully mean ones too. If I were to call the street anything but *shady*, I should be boasting. The people sit at their doors in shirt-sleeves, smoking as they do in Seven Dials of a Sunday.

Last night we went to bed about ten, for the first time *householders* in Germany—real Teutons, with no deception, spring, or false bottom. About half-past one there began such a trumpeting, shouting, pealing of bells, and scurrying hither and thither of feet as woke every person in Frankfurt out of their first sleep with a vague sort of apprehension that the last day was at hand. The whole street was alive, and we could hear people talking in their rooms, or crying to passers-by from their windows, all around us. At last I made out what a man was saying in the next room. It was a fire in Sachsenhausen, he said (Sachsenhausen is the suburb on the other side of the Main), and he wound up with one of the most tremendous falsehoods on record, "*Hier alles ruht*—here all is still." If it can be said to be still in an engine factory, or in the stomach of a volcano when it is meditating an eruption, he might have been justified in what he said, but not otherwise. The tumult continued unabated for near an hour; but as one grew used to it, it gradually resolved itself into three bells, answering

each other at short intervals across the town, a man shouting, at ever shorter intervals and with superhuman energy, "*Feuer—in Sachsenhausen*," and the almost continuous winding of all manner of bugles and trumpets, sometimes in stirring flourishes, and sometimes in mere tuneless wails. Occasionally there was another rush of feet past the window, and once there was a mighty drumming, down between us and the river, as though the soldiery were turning out to keep the peace. This was all we had of the fire, except a great cloud, all flushed red with the glare, above the roofs on the other side of the Gasse; but it was quite enough to put me entirely off my sleep and make me keenly alive to three or four gentlemen who were strolling leisurely about my person, and every here and there leaving me somewhat as a keepsake. . . . However, everything has its compensation, and when day came at last, and the sparrows awoke with trills and *carol-ets*, the dawn seemed to fall on me like a sleeping draught. I went to the window and saw the sparrows about the eaves, and a great troop of doves go strolling up the paven Gasse, seeking what they may devour. And so to sleep, despite fleas and fire-alarms and clocks chiming the hours out of neighbouring houses at all sorts of odd times and with the most charming want of unanimity.

We have got settled down in Frankfurt, and like the place very much. Simpson and I seem to get on very well together. We suit each other capitally; and it is an awful joke to be living (two would-be advocates, and one a baronet) in this supremely mean abode.

The abode is, however, a great improvement on the hotel, and I think we shall grow quite fond of it.—Ever your affectionate son,

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Thomas Stevenson

*Sunday, August 11th* [1872]
*Rosengasse, Frankfurt*

My dear Father,—I can scarcely tell you what a lucky thing your draft was ; indeed the best way to explain it to you is to begin from the beginning and tell the affair consecutively through.

We were coming home from Bockenheim last night about ten, and in fine spirits, when my tobacco ran short and instead of going for our nightcap, we came up here. When I opened the door, there was a telegraph man standing inside the lobby. Simpson's second brother was alarmingly ill. We went straight to the station but the last train was gone. This morning we were up by five (a needless nuisance, as we found afterwards that he would arrive equally soon by a later train and so he is still here—12 o'clock) ; but then the following hitch was discovered. He had only four Napoleons in money ; all the banks were shut of course, so that no draft could be cashed ; and if I advanced him enough, I should be left here, with bills to pay and my Leipsic excursion before me, a great deal nearer penniless than would be pleasant. Ruminating over this, we turned in about nine to get some sleep, after a most wretched night and morning of uncertainty and botheration ; but as luck would have it, out of mere restlessness, I determined to go first to the Post Office and so dressed myself again and arrived there, just in time—twenty minutes later would have done the trick—to get the £20 draught which at once smoothed matters over.

We have both been much amused by your precautionary note.

Seeing matters are so, I shall probably get to Baden in 7 or 8 days ; but this of course depends upon the length of the Congress and when you will be there ; as I should rather loiter on the way than arrive before you.

It is an awfully sad affair and has broken up our pleasant establishment in a sufficiently dismal manner. I hope he

will pull through yet. Simpson, who believes in presentiments, seems to think he will.

If I get a letter with Buchan's address in it to-morrow, I shall go to Leipsic at eleven o'clock that night. If I don't, I shall probably wait another day.

Poste Restante
Leipsic is the
next address of

Your afft. son
R. L. Stevenson.

*P.S.*—Write immediately you hear anything of poor Willy Simpson?

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

13 *Rosengasse*
*Frankfurt, Monday morning, August,* 1872

My dear Mother,—So I have passed another night in our lodging and this time slept like a stone. I don't think I have much to say to you: in fact, I question whether I have anything but it is a good habit to write a bit whenever you have nothing else to do. I am just going to do some Ollendorf with Simpson; and so adieu.

*Tuesday morning.*—Another letter. Good. I wish you would say in your letters, how many of mine you have received, not by date, which I do not remember, but by some recognizable headmark.

You ask if I am going to Leipsic and I reply yes. But you must tell me when Buchan will pass through Frankfurt, and send me by him complete instructions and another £10 bill, if you please. It is very difficult to live cheaply here standing still; but when it comes to travelling all my economy goes to the winds, and whatsoever my heart desireth, that I purchase.

I don't think I have told you that our room is taken for a month; so I shall just stay here quietly, except the run to

Leipsic and any excursion else that may turn up and look inviting, until a decent time to go quietly down to Baden for you.

Last night I was at the theatre and heard Die Judin (La Juive) and I was thereby most terribly excited. I was very near the tear point more than once and at last, in the middle of the Fifth Act, which is perfectly beastly, I had to slope, I could stand even seeing the cauldron with the sham fire beneath and the two hateful executioners in red, but when at last the girl's courage breaks down and, grasping her father's arm, she cries out, O, so shudderingly ! I thought it high time to be out of that galère ; and so I do not know yet whether it ends well or ill, but if I ever afterwards find that they do carry things to the extremity, I shall think more meanly of my species. It was raining and cold outside, so I went into a Bier Halle and sat and brooded over a *Schnitt* (half-glass) for nearly half an hour. An opera is far more *real* than real life to me. It seems as if stage illusion and particularly this hardest to swallow and most conventional illusion of them all—an opera, would never stale upon me. I wish that life was an opera. I should like to *live* in one ; but I don't know in what quarter of the globe I shall find a Society so constituted. Besides, it would soon fall ; imagine asking for three-kreuzer cigars in recitative, or giving the washerwoman the inventory of your dirty clothes in a sustained and *flourish-ous* aria.

I am in a right mood this morning to sit here and write to you ; but not to give you news. There is a great stir of life, in a quiet, almost country fashion, all about us here. Some one is hammering a beefsteak in the *rez-de-chaussée :* there is a great clink of pitchers and noise of the pump-handle at the public well in the little Square-kin round the corner. The children, all seemingly within a month and certainly none above five that always go halting and stumbling up and down the roadway, are ordinarily very quiet and sit sedately puddling in the gutter, trying, I suppose, poor little devils ! to understand their cursed *mutter-sprache ;* but they, too, make themselves heard from time to time in little incomprehensible antiphonies, about the drift that

comes down to them by their rivers from the strange lands higher up the Gasse. Above all, there is here such a twittering of canaries (I can see twelve out of our window) and such continual visitation of grey doves and big-nosed sparrows, as make our little bye-street into a perfect Aviary. I would this were the only branch of natural history that could be advantageously prosecuted therein; but I have expatiated enough on that head, and perhaps, too much, already. We are now finally settled down, we have given in our papers to the police and signed ourselves there as "*Rentiers*"; and, I suppose, if we only stay here long enough, we shall have something like the twentieth part of a vote at next election.

Alas, "all my golden words are spent." I have no more to say. All I can do is to look across the Gasse at our opposite neighbour, as he dandles his baby about and occasionally takes a spoonful or two of some pale, slimy nastiness that looks like *dead Porridge*, if you can take the conception. These two are his only occupations. All day long you can hear him singing over the brat, when he is not eating; or see him eating when he is not keeping baby. Besides which, there comes into his house a continual round of visitors that puts me in mind of the luncheon hour at home. As he has thus no ostensible avocation, we have named him "the W. S.," to give a flavour of respectability to the Street.

Enough of the Gasse. The weather is here much colder. It rained a good deal yesterday and though it is fair and sunshiny again to-day, and we can stills it of course with our windows open, yet there is no more excuse for the Siesta; and the Bathe in the River, except for cleanliness, is no longer a necessity of life. The Main is very swift. In one part of the baths, it is next door to impossible to swim against it, and I suspect that, out in the open, it would be quite impossible. Adieu, my dear mother, and believe me, Ever your afft. son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.
(Rentier)

Can you read my letters? I hope you can. Do tell me

what you have received and let me have some remarks upon my doings.

R. L. S.

## To Charles Baxter

On the way home with Sir Walter Simpson from Germany. The L. J. R. herein mentioned was a short-lived Essay Club of only six members; its meetings were held in a public-house in Advocate's Close, and the exact meaning of its initials has never to this day been divulged to outsiders (see the *Life* of R. L. S. by Graham Balfour, p. 90, footnote).

*Boulogne Sur Mer, Wednesday,*
*3rd or 4th September,* 1872

Blame me not that this epistle
Is the first you have from me.
Idleness has held me fettered,
But at last the times are bettered
And once more I wet my whistle
Here, in France beside the sea.

All the green and idle weather
I have had in sun and shower
Such an easy warm subsistence,
Such an indolent existence
I should find it hard to sever
Day from day and hour from hour.

Many a tract-provided ranter
May upbraid me, dark and sour,
Many a bland Utilitarian
Or excited Millenarian,
—" *Pereunt et imputantur*
You must speak to every hour."

But (the very term's deceptive)
You at least, my friend, will see,
That in sunny grassy meadows
Trailed across by moving shadows
To be actively receptive
Is as much as man can be.

He that all the winter grapples
Difficulties, thrust and ward—
Needs to cheer him thro' his duty
Memories of sun and beauty
Orchards with the russet apples
Lying scattered on the sward.

Many such I keep in prison,
Keep them here at heart unseen,
Till my muse again rehearses
Long years hence, and in my verses
You shall meet them rearisen
Ever comely, ever green.

You know how they never perish,
How, in time of later art,
Memories consecrate and sweeten
These defaced and tempest-beaten
Flowers of former years we cherish,
Half a life, against our heart.

Most, those love-fruits withered greenly,
Those frail, sickly amourettes,
How they brighten with the distance
Take new strength and new existence
Till we see them sitting queenly
Crowned and courted by regrets !

All that loveliest and best is,
Aureole-fashion round their head,
They that looked in life but plainly,
How they stir our spirits vainly
When they come to us Alcestis-
Like returning from the dead !

Not the old love but another,
Bright she comes at Memory's call
Our forgotten vows reviving
To a newer, livelier living,
As the dead child to the mother
Seems the fairest child of all

Thus our Goethe, sacred master,
Travelling backward thro' his youth,
Surely wandered wrong in trying
To renew the old, undying
Loves that cling in memory faster
Than they ever lived in truth.

So ; *en voilà assez de mauvais vers*. Let us finish with a word or two in honest prose, tho' indeed I shall so soon be back again, and, if you be in town as I hope, so soon get linked again down the Lothian road by a cigar or two and a liquor, that it is perhaps scarce worth the postage to send my letter on before me. I have just been long enough away to be satisfied and even anxious to get home again and talk the matter over with my friends. I shall have plenty to tell you ; and principally plenty that I do not care to write ; and I daresay, you, too, will have a lot of gossip. What about Ferrier ? Is the L. J. R. think you to go naked and unashamed this winter ? He with his charming idiosyncrasy was in my eyes the vine-leaf that preserved our self-respect. All the rest of us are such shadows, compared to his full-flavoured personality ; but I must not spoil my own *début*. I am trenching upon one of the essayettes which I propose to introduce, as a novelty, this year before that august assembly. For we must not let it die. It is a sickly baby, but what with nursing, and pap, and the like, I do not see why it should not have a stout manhood after all, and perhaps a green old age. Eh ! when we are old (if we ever should be) that too will be one of those cherished memories I have been so rhapsodizing over. We must consecrate our room. We must make it a museum of bright recollections ; so that we may go back there white-headed, and say " Vixi." After all, new countries, sun, music, and all the rest can never take down our gusty, rainy, smoky, grim old city out of the first place that it has been making for itself in the bottom of my soul, by all pleasant and hard things that have befallen me for these past twenty years or so. My heart is buried there—say, in Advocate's Close !

Simpson and I got on very well together, and made a very suitable pair. I like him much better than I did when I started which was almost more than I hoped for.

If you should chance to see Bob, give him my news or if you have the letter about you, let him see it.—Ever your Affct. friend,

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Charles Baxter

Through the jesting tenor of this letter is to be discerned a vein of more than half-serious thinking very characteristic of R. L. S. alike as youth and man.

17 *Heriot Row, Edinburgh, October,* 1872

My dear Baxter,—I am gum-boiled and face swollen to an unprecedented degree. It is depressing to suffer from gibber that cannot be brought to a head. I cannot speak it, because my face is so swollen and stiff that enunciation must be deliberate—a thing your true gibberer cannot hold up his head under ; and writ gibber is somehow not gibber at all, it does not come forth, does not *flow*, with that fine irrational freedom that it loves in speech—it does not afford relief to the packed bosom.

Hence I am suffering from *suppressed gibber*—an uneasy complaint ; and like all cases of suppressed humours, this hath a nasty tendency to the brain. Therefore (the more confused I get, the more I lean on Thus's and Hences and Therefores) you must not be down upon me, most noble Festus, altho' this letter should smack of some infirmity of judgment. I speak the words of soberness and truth ; and would you were not almost but altogether as I am, except this swelling. Lord, Lord, if we could change personalities how we should hate it. How I should rebel at the office, repugn under the Ulster coat, and repudiate your monkish humours thus unjustly and suddenly thrust upon poor, infidel me ! And as for you—why, my dear Charles, " a mouse that hath its lodging in a cat's ear " would not be so uneasy as you in your new conditions. I do not see how

your temperament would come thro' the feverish longings to do things that cannot then (or perhaps ever) be accomplished, the feverish unrests and damnable indecisions, that it takes all my easy-going spirits to come through. A vane can live out anything in the shape of a wind ; and that is how I can be, and am, a more serious person than you. Just as the light French seemed very serious to Sterne, light L. Stevenson can afford to bob about over the top of any deep sea of prospect or retrospect, where ironclad C. Baxter would incontinently go down with all hands. A fool is generally the wisest person out. The wise man must shut his eyes to all the perils and horrors that lie around him ; but the cap and bells can go bobbing along the most slippery ledges and the bauble will not stir up sleeping lions. Hurray ! for motley, for a good sound *insouciance*, for a healthy philosophic carelessness !

My dear Baxter, a word in your ear—" DON'T YOU WISH YOU WERE A FOOL ? " How easy the world would go on with you—literally on castors. The only reason a wise man can assign for getting drunk is that he wishes to enjoy for a while the blessed immunities and sunshiny weather of the land of fooldom. But a fool, who dwells ever there, has no excuse at all. *That* is a happy land, if you like—and not so far away either. Take a fool's advice and let us strive without ceasing to get into it. Hark in your ear again : " THEY ALLOW PEOPLE TO REASON IN THAT LAND." I wish I could take you by the hand and lead you away into its pleasant boundaries. There is no custom-house on the frontier, and you may take in what books you will. There are no manners and customs ; but men and women grow up, like trees in a still, well-walled garden, " at their own sweet will." There is no prescribed or customary folly—no motley, cap, or bauble : out of the well of each one's own innate absurdity he is allowed and encouraged freely to draw and to communicate ; and it is a strange thing how this natural fooling comes so nigh to one's better thoughts of wisdom ; and stranger still, that all this discord of people speaking in their own natural moods and keys, masses itself into a far more perfect harmony than all the

dismal, official unison in which they sing in other countries. Part-singing seems best all the world over.

I who live in England must wear the hackneyed symbols of the profession, to show that I have (at least) consular immunities, coming as I do out of another land, where they are not so wise as they are here, but fancy that God likes what he makes and is not best pleased with us when we deface and dissemble all that he has given us and put about us to one common standard of—— Highty-Tighty !—when was a jester obliged to finish his sentence ? I cut so strong a pirouette that all my bells jingle, and come down in an attitude, with one hand upon my hip. The evening's entertainment is over,—" and if our kyind friends——"

Hurrah ! I feel relieved. I have put out my gibber, and if you have read thus far, you will have taken it in. I wonder if you will ever come this length. I shall try a trap for you, and insult you here, on this last page. " O Baxter what a damned humbug you are ! " There,—shall this insult bloom and die unseen, or will you come towards me, when next we meet, with a face deformed with anger and demand speedy and bloody satisfaction ? *Nous verrons*, which is French.

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Charles Baxter

In the winter of 1872-73 Stevenson was out of health again: and by the beginning of Spring there began the trouble which for the next twelve months clouded his home life. The following shows exactly in what spirit he took it :—

17 *Heriot Row, Edinburgh*
*Sunday, February 2,* 1873

My dear Baxter,—The thunderbolt has fallen with a vengeance now. On Friday night after leaving you, in the course of conversation, my father put me one or two questions as to beliefs, which I candidly answered. I really hate all lying so much now—a new-found honesty that has somehow come out of my late illness—that I could not so much as hesitate at the time ; but if I had foreseen the real

hell of everything since, I think I should have lied, as I have done so often before. I so far thought of my father, but I had forgotten my mother. And now! they are both ill, both silent, both as down in the mouth as if—I can find no simile. You may fancy how happy it is for me. If it were not too late, I think I could almost find it in my heart to retract, but it is too late; and again, am I to live my whole life as one falsehood? Of course, it is rougher than hell upon my father, but can I help it? They don't see either that my game is not the light-hearted scoffer; that I am not (as they call me) a careless infidel. I believe as much as they do, only generally in the inverse ratio: I am, I think, as honest as they can be in what I hold. I have not come hastily to my views. I reserve (as I told them) many points until I acquire fuller information, and do not think I am thus justly to be called "horrible atheist."

Now, what is to take place? What a curse I am to my parents! O Lord, what a pleasant thing it is to have just *damned* the happiness of (probably) the only two people who care a damn about you in the world.

What is my life to be at this rate? What, you rascal? Answer—I have a pistol at your throat. If all that I hold true and most desire to spread is to be such death, and worse than death, in the eyes of my father and mother, what the *devil* am I to do?

Here is a good heavy cross with a vengeance, and all rough with rusty nails that tear your fingers, only it is not I that have to carry it alone; I hold the light end, but the heavy burden falls on these two.

Don't—I don't know what I was going to say. I am an abject idiot, which, all things considered, is not remarkable.—Ever your affectionate and horrible atheist,

R. L. STEVENSON.

## II

## STUDENT DAYS—*Continued*

### NEW FRIENDSHIPS—ORDERED SOUTH

### July, 1873—May, 1874

## II

## STUDENT DAYS—*Continued*

THE year 1873 was a critical one in Stevenson's life. Late in July he went for the second time to pay a visit to Cockfield Rectory, the pleasant Suffolk home of his cousin Mrs. Churchill Babington and her husband. Another guest at the same time was Mrs. Sitwell—my wife as she was later to be—an intimate friend and connection by marriage of the hostess. I was shortly due to join the party, when Mrs. Sitwell wrote telling me of the " fine young spirit " she had found under her friend's roof, and suggesting that I should hasten my visit so as to make his acquaintance before he left. I came accordingly, and from that time on the fine young spirit became a leading interest both in her life and mine. He had thrown himself on her sympathies, in that troubled hour of his youth, with entire dependence almost from the first, and clung to her devotedly for the next two years as to an inspirer, consoler, and guide. Under her influence he began for the first time to see his way in life, and to believe hopefully and manfully in his own powers and future. To encourage such hopes further, and to lend what hand one could towards their fulfilment, became quickly one of the first of cares and pleasures. It was impossible not to recognise, in this very un-academical type of Scottish youth, a spirit the most interesting and full of promise. His social charm was already at its height, and quite irresistible ; but inwardly he was full of trouble and self-doubt. If he could steer himself or be steered safely through the difficulties of youth, and if he could learn to write with half the charm and genius that shone from his presence and conversation, there seemed room to hope for the highest from him. He went back to Edinburgh in the beginning of September full of new hope and heart. Several of the schemes begun at this time and mentioned with eagerness in his letters came in the end to nothing ; others of his efforts were readily accepted by such editors as Philip Gilbert Hamerton (*The Portfolio*), George Grove (*Macmillan's Magazine*), and Leslie Stephen (*Cornhill Magazine*).

It had been agreed that while still reading, as his parents

desired, for the bar, he should try seriously to get ready for publication some essays which he had already on hand—one on Walt Whitman, one on John Knox, one on Roads and the Spirit of the Road—and should so far as possible avoid topics of dispute in the home circle. But after a while the news of him was not favourable. Those differences with his father, which had been weighing almost morbidly upon his high-strung nature, were renewed. By mid-October his letters told of failing health. He came to London, and instead of presenting himself, as had been proposed, to be examined for admission to one of the London Inns of Court, he was forced to consult the late Sir Andrew Clark, who found him suffering from acute nerve exhaustion, with some threat of danger to the lungs. He was ordered to break at once with Edinburgh for a time, and to spend the winter in a more soothing climate and surroundings. He went accordingly to Mentone, a place he had delighted in as a boy ten years before, and during a stay of six months on that enchanted coast made a slow, but for the time being a pretty complete, recovery. I visited him twice during the winter, the first time at Christmas, getting him to meet me and spend a few days partly at Monaco and partly at Monte Carlo near by, and for the second and longer time staying with him at Monaco itself. Here I found him in a fair way to regain at least his normal health in the southern peace and sunshine. He was busy with the essay *Ordered South*, and with that on *Victor Hugo's Romances*, which was afterwards his first contribution to the *Cornhill Magazine*; was full of a thousand dreams and projects for future work; and was passing his invalid days pleasantly meanwhile in the companionship of two kind and accomplished Russian ladies, who took to him warmly, and of their children. The following record of the time is drawn from his correspondence partly with his parents and partly with myself, but chiefly from the journal-letters, containing a full and intimate record of his daily moods and doings, which he was accustomed to send off weekly or oftener to Mrs. Sitwell. His first quarters were at the Hotel du Pavillon: after the Christmas excursion to Monaco and Monte Carlo he shifted them to the Hotel Mirabeau.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

This is from his cousin's house in Suffolk. Some of the impressions then received of the contrasts between Scotland and England were later worked out in the essay, *The Foreigner at Home*, printed at the head of *Memories and Portraits*.

*Cockfield Rectory, Sudbury, Suffolk*
*Tuesday, July 28, 1873*

My dear Mother,—I am too happy to be much of a correspondent. Yesterday we were away to Melford and Lavenham, both exceptionally placid, beautiful old English towns. Melford scattered all round a big green, with an Elizabethan Hall and Park, great screens of trees that seem twice as high as trees should seem, and everything else what ought to be in a novel, and what one never expects to see in reality, made me cry out how good we were to live in Scotland, for the many hundredth time. I cannot get over my astonishment—indeed, it increases every day—at the hopeless gulf that there is between England and Scotland, and English and Scotch. Nothing is the same; and I feel as strange and outlandish here as I do in France or Germany. Everything by the wayside, in the houses, or about the people, strikes me with an unexpected unfamiliarity: I walk among surprises, for just where you think you have them, something wrong turns up.

I got a little Law read yesterday, and some German this morning, but on the whole there are too many amusements going for much work; as for correspondence, I have neither heart nor time for it to-day.

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

After leaving Cockfield Stevenson spent a few days in London and a few with me in a cottage I then had at Norwood. This and the following letters were written in the next days after his return home. "Bob" in the last paragraph is Louis's elder cousin Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson, to whom he had been from boyhood devotedly attached : afterwards known as the brilliant painter-critic and author of *Velasquez,* etc.

*17 Heriot Row, Edinburgh*
*Monday, September 1st,* 1873

I HAVE arrived, as you see, without accident ; but I never had a more wretched journey in my life. I could not settle to read anything ; I bought Darwin's last book in despair, for I knew I could generally read Darwin, but it was a failure. However, the book served me in good stead ; for when a couple of children got in at Newcastle, I struck up a great friendship with them on the strength of the illustrations. These two children (a girl of nine and a boy of six) had never before travelled in a railway, so that everything was a glory to them, and they were never tired of watching the telegraph posts and trees and hedges go racing past us to the tail of the train ; and the girl I found quite entered into the most daring personifications that I could make. A little way on, about Alnmouth, they had their first sight of the sea ; and it was wonderful how loath they were to believe that what they saw was water ; indeed it was very still and grey and solid-looking under a sky to match. It was worth the fare, yet a little farther on, to see the delight of the girl when she passed into "another country," with the black Tweed under our feet, crossed by the lamps of the passenger bridge. I remember the first time I had gone into "another country," over the same river from the other side.

Bob was not at the station when I arrived ; but a friend of his brought me a letter ; and he is to be in the first thing to-morrow. Do you know, I think yesterday and the day before were the two happiest days of

my life? I would not have missed last month for eternity.—Ever yours,

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[17 *Heriot Row, Edinburgh*]
*September*, 1873

I WENT away so happy on Saturday night, my dear friend; I could not contain my happiness and the people that passed looked at me with a point of interrogation for a long way. You need not be afraid of my writing so; it is all right and I cannot tell you how good a thing it is for me that I came to London and saw you. I am still rather tired, but well. I cannot pretend that I am glad to be back in Edinburgh. I find that I hate the place now to the backbone and only keep myself quiet by telling myself that it is not for ever.

They were glad to see me and in a kind of way so was I; but that is a horrid subject.

I just finished in a hurry; this is not a letter but an intimation. Good-bye,

Ever your faithful friend,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

The pleasure has not yet passed out of my nerves; I feel so quiet and pleasant to myself.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The paper on *Roads* herein mentioned had been planned during walks at Cockfield; was offered to and rejected by the *Saturday Review* and ultimately accepted by Mr. Hamerton for the *Portfolio;* and was the first regular or paid contribution of Stevenson to periodical literature.

17 *Heriot Row, Edinburgh*
*Saturday, September* 6, 1873

I HAVE been to-day a very long walk with my father through some of the most beautiful ways hereabouts; the

day was cold with an iron, windy sky, and only glorified now and then with autumn sunlight. For it is fully autumn with us, with a blight already over the greens, and a keen wind in the morning that makes one rather timid of one's tub when it finds its way indoors.

I was out this evening to call on a friend, and, coming back through the wet, crowded, lamp-lit streets, was singing after my own fashion, "*Du hast Diamanten und Perlen*," when I heard a poor cripple man in the gutter wailing over a pitiful Scotch air, his club-foot supported on the other knee, and his whole woebegone body propped sideways against a crutch. The nearest lamp threw a strong light on his worn, sordid face and the three boxes of lucifer matches that he held for sale. My own false notes stuck in my chest. How well off I am! is the burthen of my songs all day long—"*Drum ist so wohl mir in der Welt!*" and the ugly reality of the cripple man was an intrusion on the beautiful world in which I was walking. He could no more sing than I could; and his voice was cracked and rusty, and altogether perished. To think that that wreck may have walked the streets some night years ago, as glad at heart as I was, and promising himself a future as golden and honourable!

*Sunday*, 11.20 A.M.—I wonder what you are doing now? —in church likely, at the *Te Deum*. Everything here is utterly silent. I can hear men's footfalls streets away; the whole life of Edinburgh has been sucked into sundry pious edifices; the gardens below my windows are steeped in a diffused sunlight, and every tree seems standing on tiptoes, strained and silent, as though to get its head above its neighbour's and *listen*. You know what I mean, don't you? How trees do seem silently to assert themselves on an occasion! I have been trying to write *Roads* until I feel as if I were standing on my head; but I mean *Roads*, and shall do something to them.

I wish I could make you feel the hush that is over everything, only made the more perfect by rare interruptions; and the rich, placid light, and the still, autumnal foliage. Houses, you know, stand all about our gar-

dens : solid, steady blocks of houses ; all look empty and asleep.

*Monday night.*—The drums and fifes up in the castle are sounding the guard-call through the dark, and there is a great rattle of carriages without. I have had (I must tell you) my bed taken out of this room, so that I am alone in it with my books and two tables, and two chairs, and a coal-skuttle (or *scuttle*) (?) and a *débris* of broken pipes in a corner, and my old school play-box, so full of papers and books that the lid will not shut down, standing reproachfully in the midst. There is something in it that is still a little gaunt and vacant ; it needs a little populous disorder over it to give it the feel of homeliness, and perhaps a bit more furniture, just to take the edge off the sense of illimitable space, eternity, and a future state, and the like, that is brought home to one, even in this small attic, by the wide, empty floor.

You would require to know, what only I can ever know, many grim and many maudlin passages out of my past life to feel how great a change has been made for me by this past summer. Let me be ever so poor and thread-paper a soul, I am going to try for the best.

These good booksellers of mine have at last got a *Werther* without illustrations. I want you to like Charlotte. Werther himself has every feebleness and vice that could tend to make his suicide a most virtuous and commendable action ; and yet I like Werther too—I don't know why, except that he has written the most delightful letters in the world. Note, by the way, the passage under date June 21st not far from the beginning ; it finds a voice for a great deal of dumb, uneasy, pleasurable longing that we have all had, times without number. I looked that up the other day for *Roads*, so I know the reference ; but you will find it a garden of flowers from beginning to end. All through the passion keeps steadily rising, from the thunderstorm at the country-house—there was thunder in that story too—up to the last wild delirious interview, either Lotte was no good at all, or else Werther should have remained alive after that ; either he knew his woman too well, or else he

was precipitate. But an idiot like that is hopeless; and yet, he wasn't an idiot—I make reparation, and will offer eighteen pounds of best wax at his tomb. Poor devil! he was only the weakest—or, at least, a very weak strong man.

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh*]
*Tuesday, Sept. 9th,* 1873, 11.40 P.M.

I was sitting up here working away at John Knox, when the door opened and Bob came in with his hands over his face and sank down on a chair and began to sob. He was scarcely able to speak at first, but he found voice at last, and I then found that he had come to see me, had met my father in the way and had just brought to an end an interview with him. There is now, at least, one person in the world who knows what I have had to face, and what a tempest of emotions my father can raise when he is really excited. I am so tired at heart and tired in body that I cannot tell you the result to-night. They shook hands; my father said that he wished him all happiness, but prayed him, as the one favour that could be done him, that he should never see him between the eyes again. And so parted my father and my friend. To-morrow I shall give more details.

*Wednesday.*—The object of the interview is not very easy to make out; it had no practical issue except the ludicrous one that Bob promised never to talk Religion to me any more. It was awfully rough on him, you know; he had no idea that there was that sort of thing in the world, although I had told him often enough—my father on his knees and that kind of thing. O dear, dear, I just hold on to your hand very tight and shut my eyes. If it had not been for the thoughts of you, I should have been twice as cut up; somehow it all seems to simplify when I think of you; tell me again that I am not such cold poison to everybody as I am to some.

3 P.M.—I hope you are well. To continue the story, I have seen Bob again, and he has had a private letter from my father, apologizing for anything he may have said, but adhering to the substance of the interview. If I had not a very light heart and a great faculty of interest in what is under hand, I really think I should go mad under this wretched state of matters. Even the calm of our daily life is all glossing, there is a sort of tremor through it all and a whole world of repressed bitterness. I do not think of it, because it is one of those inevitable fates that no thinking can mend. As Luther said "Ich kann nicht anders—hier stehe ich—Gott helfe mir." And yet I did not wish to harm any one; and don't; and I *would* do what I could, if I could do anything.

Now, don't get bothered about this. It has been as bad before any time this last year, and then I had no one to talk the bitterness to.

I am afraid this letter is incoherent a little; but this and yesterday have been rather bad days with me. How poor all my troubles are compared with yours; I am such a scaly alligator and go through things on the whole so toughly and cheerily. I hope you will not misunderstand this letter and think I am *Werther*ing all over the place. I am quite happy and never think about these bothers, and I am sure if you were to ask my father and mother they would tell you that I was as unconcerned as any Heathen deity; but "heartless levity" was always one of my complaints. And a good thing, too. "Werena my heart licht, I wad die."

I take it kind in Nature, having a day of broad sunshine and a great west wind among the garden trees, at this time of all others; the sound of wind and leaves comes in to me through the window, and if I shut my eyes I might fancy myself some hundred miles away under a certain tree. And that is a consolation, too; these things *have been*.

> "To-morrow, let it shine or rain,
> Yet cannot this the past make vain;
> Nor uncreate and render void
> That which was yesterday enjoyed."

I have the proof of it at my heart, it never felt so light and happily stirred in the old days. Just now, when the whole world looks to me as if it were lit with gas, and life a sort of metropolitan railway, it is a great thing to have clear memory of sunny places. How my mind rings the changes upon sun and sunny! Farewell, my dearest friend,

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*17 Heriot Row, Edinburgh*
*Friday, September 12, 1873*

. . . I was over last night, contrary to my own wish, in Leven, Fife; and this morning I had a conversation of which, I think, some account might interest you. I was up with a cousin who was fishing in a mill-lade, and a shower of rain drove me for shelter into a tumble-down steading attached to the mill. There I found a labourer cleaning a byre, with whom I fell into talk. The man was to all appearance as heavy, as *hébété*, as any English clodhopper; but I knew I was in Scotland, and launched out forthright into Education and Politics and the aims of one's life. I told him how I had found the peasantry in Suffolk, and added that their state had made me feel quite pained and down-hearted. "It but to do that," he said, "to onybody that thinks at a'!" Then, again, he said that he could not conceive how anything could daunt or cast down a man who had an aim in life. "They that have had a guid schoolin' and do nae mair, whatever they do, they have done; but him that has aye something ayont need never be weary." I have had to mutilate the dialect much, so that it might be comprehensible to you; but I think the sentiment will keep, even through a change of words, something of the heartsome ring of encouragement that it had for me: and that from a man cleaning a byre! You see what John Knox and his schools have done.

*Saturday.*—This has been a charming day for me from

morning to now (5 P.M.). First, I found your letter, and went down and read it on a seat in those Public Gardens of which you have heard already. After lunch, my father and I went down to the coast and walked a little way along the shore between Granton and Cramond. This has always been with me a very favourite walk. The Firth closes gradually together before you, the coast runs in a series of the most beautifully moulded bays, hill after hill, wooded and softly outlined, trends away in front till the two shores join together. When the tide is out there are great, gleaming flats of wet sand, over which the gulls go flying and crying ; and every cape runs down into them with its little spit of wall and trees. We lay together a long time on the beach ; the sea just babbled among the stones ; and at one time we heard the hollow, sturdy beat of the paddles of an unseen steamer somewhere round the cape. I am glad to say that the peace of the day and scenery was not marred by any unpleasantness between us two.

I am, unhappily, off my style, and can do nothing well ; indeed, I fear I have marred *Roads* finally by patching at it when I was out of the humour. Only, I am beginning to see something great about John Knox and Queen Mary : I like them both so much, that I feel as if I could write the history fairly.

*Sunday*.—It has rained and blown chilly out of the East all day. This was my first visit to church since the last Sunday at Cockfield. I was alone, and read the minor prophets and thought of the past all the time ; a sentimental Calvinist preached—a very odd animal, as you may fancy—and to him I did not attend very closely. All afternoon I worked until half-past four, when I went out, under an umbrella, and cruised about the empty, wet, glimmering streets until near dinner time.

I have finished *Roads* to-day, and send it off to you to see. The Lord knows whether it is worth anything !—some of it pleases me a good deal, but I fear it is quite unfit for any possible magazine. However, I wish you to see it, as you know the humour in which it was conceived, walking alone and very happily about the Suffolk highways

and byways on several splendid sunny afternoons.—Believe me, ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

*Monday.*—I have looked over *Roads* again, and I am aghast at its feebleness. It is the trial of a very " 'prentice hand " indeed. Shall I ever learn to do anything *well?* However, it shall go to you, for the reasons given above.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

After an outpouring about difficulties at home

*Edinburgh, Tuesday, September* 16, 1873

. . . I MUST be very strong to have all this vexation and still to be well. I was weighed the other day, and the gross weight of my large person was eight stone six ! Does it not seem surprising that I can keep the lamp alight, through all this gusty weather, in so frail a lantern ? And yet it burns cheerily.

My mother is leaving for the country this morning, and my father and I will be alone for the best part of the week in this house. Then on Friday I go south to Dumfries till Monday. I must write small, or I shall have a tremendous budget by then.

7.20 P.M.—I must tell you a thing I saw to-day. I was going down to Portobello in the train, when there came into the next compartment (third class) an artisan, strongly marked with smallpox, and with sunken, heavy eyes—a face hard and unkind, and without anything lovely. There was a woman on the platform seeing him off. At first sight, with her one eye blind and the whole cast of her features strongly plebeian and even vicious, she seemed as unpleasant as the man ; but there was something beautifully soft, a sort of light of tenderness, as on some Dutch Madonna, that came over her face when she looked at the man. They talked for a while together through the window ; the man seemed to have been asking money. " Ye ken the last time," she said, " I gave ye two shillin's for

your ludgin', and ye said—— " it died off into whisper. Plainly Falstaff and Dame Quickly over again. The man laughed unpleasantly, even cruelly, and said something ; and the woman turned her back on the carriage and stood a long while so, and, do what I might, I could catch no glimpse of her expression, although I thought I saw the heave of a sob in her shoulders. At last, after the train was already in motion, she turned round and put two shillings into his hand. I saw her stand and look after us with a perfect heaven of love on her face—this poor one-eyed Madonna—until the train was out of sight ; but the man, sordidly happy with his gains, did not put himself to the inconvenience of one glance to thank her for her ill-deserved kindness.

I have been up at the Spec., and looked out a reference I wanted. The whole town is drowned in white, wet vapour off the sea. Everything drips and soaks. The very statues seem wet to the skin. I cannot pretend to be very cheerful ; I did not see one contented face in the streets ; and the poor did look so helplessly chill and dripping, without a stitch to change, or so much as a fire to dry themselves at, or perhaps money to buy a meal, or perhaps even a bed. My heart shivers for them.

*Dumfries, Friday.*—All my thirst for a little warmth, a little sun, a little corner of blue sky avails nothing. Without, the rain falls with a long-drawn *swish*, and the night is as dark as a vault. There is no wind indeed, and that is a blessed change after the unruly, bedlamite gusts that have been charging against one round street corners and utterly abolishing and destroying all that is peaceful in life. Nothing sours my temper like these coarse termagant winds. I hate practical joking ; and your vulgarest practical joker is your flaw of wind.

I have tried to write some verses ; but I find I have nothing to say that has not been already perfectly said and perfectly sung in *Adelaïde*. I have so perfect an idea out of that song ! The great Alps, a wonder in the starlight—the river, strong from the hills, and turbulent, and loudly audible at night—the country, a scented *Frühlingsgarten* of

orchards and deep wood where the nightingales harbour—a sort of German flavour over all—and this love-drunken man, wandering on by sleeping village and silent town, pours out of his full heart, *Einst, O Wunder, einst*, etc. I wonder if I am wrong about this being the most beautiful and perfect thing in the world—the only marriage of really accordant words and music—both drunk with the same poignant, unutterable sentiment.

To-day in Glasgow my father went off on some business, and my mother and I wandered about for two hours. We had lunch together, and were very merry over what the people at the restaurant would think of us—mother and son they could not suppose us to be.

*Saturday*.—And to-day it came—warmth, sunlight, and a strong, hearty, living wind among the trees. I found myself a new being. My father and I went off a long walk, through a country most beautifully wooded and various, under a range of hills. You should have seen one place where the wood suddenly fell away in front of us down a long, steep hill between a double row of trees, with one small fair-haired child framed in shadow in the foreground ; and when we got to the foot there was the little kirk and kirkyard of Irongray, among broken fields and woods by the side of the bright, rapid river. In the kirkyard there was a wonderful congregation of tombstones, upright and recumbent on four legs (after our Scotch fashion), and of flat-armed fir-trees. One gravestone was erected by Scott (at a cost, I learn, of £70) to the poor woman who served him as heroine in the *Heart of Midlothian*, and the inscription in its stiff, Jedediah Cleishbotham fashion is not without something touching.* We went up the stream a little farther to where two Covenanters lie buried in an oakwood ; the tombstone (as the custom is) containing the details of their grim little tragedy in funnily bad rhyme, one verse of which sticks in my memory :—

> " We died, their furious rage to stay,
> Near to the kirk of Iron-gray."

* See Scott himself in the Preface to the Author's edition.

We then fetched a long compass round about through Holywood Kirk and Lincluden ruins to Dumfries. But the walk came sadly to grief as a pleasure excursion before our return. . . .

*Sunday*.—Another beautiful day. My father and I walked into Dumfries to church. When the service was done I noted the two halberts laid against the pillar of the churchyard gate ; and as I had not seen the little weekly pomp of civic dignitaries in our Scotch country towns for some years, I made my father wait. You should have seen the provost and three bailies going stately away down the sunlit street, and the two town servants strutting in front of them, in red coats and cocked hats, and with the halberts most conspicuously shouldered. We saw Burns's house—a place that made me deeply sad—and spent the afternoon down the banks of the Nith. I had not spent a day by a river since we lunched in the meadows near Sudbury. The air was as pure and clear and sparkling as spring water ; beautiful, graceful outlines of hill and wood shut us in on every side ; and the swift, brown river fled smoothly away from before our eyes, rippled over with oily eddies and dimples. White gulls had come up from the sea to fish, and hovered and flew hither and thither among the loops of the stream. By good fortune, too, it was a dead calm between my father and me. Do you know, I find these rows harder on me than ever. I get a funny swimming in the head when they come on that I had not before—and the like when I think of them.

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh*], *Monday, 22nd September*, 1873

I HAVE just had another disagreeable to-night. It is difficult indeed to steer steady among the breakers : I am always touching ground ; generally it is my own blame, for I cannot help getting friendly with my father (whom I *do* love), and so speaking foolishly with my mouth. I have

yet to learn in ordinary conversation that reserve and silence that I must try to unlearn in the matter of the feelings.

The news that *Roads* would do reached me in good season ; I had begun utterly to despair of doing anything. Certainly I do not think I should be in a hurry to commit myself about the Covenanters ; the whole subject turns round about me and so branches out to this side and that, that I grow bewildered ; and one cannot write discreetly about any one little corner of an historical period, until one has an organic view of the whole. I have, however—given life and health—great hope of my Covenanters ; indeed, there is a lot of precious dust to be beaten out of that stack even by a very infirm hand.

*Much later.*—I can scarcely see to write just now ; so please excuse. We have had an awful scene. All that my father had to say has been put forth—not that it was anything new ; only it is the devil to hear. I don't know what to do—the world goes hopelessly round about me ; there is no more possibility of doing, living, being anything but a *beast*, and there's the end of it.

It is eleven, I think, for a clock struck. O Lord, there has been a deal of time through our hands since I went down to supper ! All this has come from my own folly ; I somehow could not think the gulf so impassable, and I read him some notes on the Duke of Argyll *—I thought he would agree so far, and that we might have some rational discussion on the rest. And now—after some hours—he has told me that he is a weak man, and that I am driving him too far, and that I know not what I am doing. O dear God, this is bad work !

I have lit a pipe and feel calmer. I say, my dear friend, I am killing my father—he told me to-night (by the way) that I alienated utterly my mother—and this is the result of my attempt to start fair and fresh and to do my best for all of them.

I must wait till to-morrow ere I finish. I am to-night too excited.

*Tuesday.*—The sun is shining to-day, which is a great

* *I.e.* on his book, *The Reign of Law.*

matter, and altogether the gale having blown off again, I live in a precarious lull. On the whole I am not displeased with last night ; I kept my eyes open through it all, and I think, not only avoided saying anything that could make matters worse in the future, but said something that *may* do good. But a little better or a little worse is a trifle. I lay in bed this morning awake, for I was tired and cold and in no special hurry to rise, and heard my father go out for the papers ; and then I lay and wished—O, if he would only *whistle* when he comes in again ! But of course he did not. I have stopped that pipe.

Now, you see, I have written to you this time and sent it off, for both of which God forgive me.—Ever your faithful friend,

R. L. S.

My father and I together can put about a year through in half an hour. Look here, you mustn't take this too much to heart. I shall be all right in a few hours. It's impossible to depress me. And of course, when you can't do anything, there's no need of being depressed. It's all waste tissue.

L.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh*], *Wednesday, September 24th,* 1873

I HAVE found another " flowering isle." All this beautiful, quiet, sunlit day, I have been out in the country ; down by the sea on my favourite coast between Granton and Queensferry. There was a delicate, delicious haze over the firth and sands on one side, and on the other was the shadow of the woods all riven with great golden rifts of sunshine. A little faint talk of waves upon the beach ; the wild strange crying of seagulls over the sea ; and the hoarse wood-pigeons and shrill, sweet robins full of their autumn love-making among the trees made up a delectable concerto of peaceful noises. I spent the whole afternoon among these sights and sounds with Simpson. And we came home from Queensferry on the outside of the coach and four,

along a beautiful way full of ups and downs among woody, uneven country, laid out (fifty years ago, I suppose) by my grandfather, on the notion of Hogarth's line of beauty. You see my taste for roads is hereditary.

*Friday*.—I was wakened this morning by a long flourish of bugles and a roll upon the drums—the *réveil* at the Castle. I went to the window ; it was a grey, quiet dawn, a few people passed already up the street between the gardens, already I heard the noise of an early cab somewhere in the distance, most of the lamps had been extinguished but not all, and there were two or three lit windows in the opposite façade that showed where sick people and watchers had been awake all night and knew not yet of the new, cool day. This appealed to me with a special sadness : how often in the old times my nurse and I had looked across at these, and sympathised.

I wish you would read Michelet's *Louis Quatorze et la Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes*. I read it out in the garden, and the autumnal trees and weather, and my own autumnal humour, and the pitiable prolonged tragedies of Madame and of Molière, as they look, darkling and sombre, out of their niches in the great gingerbread façade of the *Grand Âge*, go wonderfully hand in hand.

I wonder if my revised paper has pleased the *Saturday?* If it has not, I shall be rather sorry—no, very sorry indeed —but not surprised and certainly not hurt. It will be a great disappointment ; but I am glad to say that, among all my queasy, troublesome feelings, I have not a sensitive vanity. Not that I am not as conceited as you know me to be ; only I go easy over the coals in that matter.

I have been out reading Hallam in the garden ; and have been talking with my old friend the gardener, a man of singularly hard favour and few teeth. He consulted me this afternoon on the choice of books, premising that his taste ran mainly on war and travel. On travel I had to own at once my ignorance. I suggested Kinglake, but he had read that ; and so, finding myself here unhorsed, I turned about and at last recollected Southey's *Lives of the Admirals*, and the volumes of Macaulay containing the wars

of William. Can you think of any other for this worthy man? I believe him to hold me in as high an esteem as any one can do; and I reciprocate his respect, for he is quite an intelligent companion.

On Saturday morning I read Morley's article aloud to Bob in one of the walks of the public garden. I was full of it and read most excitedly; and we were ever, as we went to and fro, passing a bench where a man sat reading the Bible aloud to a small circle of the devout. This man is well known to me, sits there all day, sometimes reading, sometimes singing, sometimes distributing tracts. Bob laughed much at the opposition preachers—I never noticed it till he called my attention to the other; but it did not seem to me like opposition—does it to you?—each in his way was teaching what he thought best.

Last night, after reading Walt Whitman a long while for my attempt to write about him, I got *tête-montée*, rushed out up to M. S., came in, took out *Leaves of Grass*, and without giving the poor unbeliever time to object, proceeded to wade into him with favourite passages. I had at least this triumph, that he swore he must read some more of him.—Ever your faithful friend,

LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

On the question of the authorship of the *Ode to the Cuckoo*, which Burke thought the most beautiful lyric in our language, the debate is between the claims of John Logan, minister of South Leith (1745-1785), and his friend and fellow-worker Michael Bruce. Those of Logan have, I believe, been now vindicated past doubt.

[*Edinburgh*], *Saturday, October* 4, 1873

IT is a little sharp to-day; but bright and sunny with a sparkle in the air, which is delightful after four days of unintermitting rain. In the streets I saw two men meet after a long separation, it was plain. They came forward with a little run and *leaped* at each other's hands. You

never saw such bright eyes as they both had. It put one in a good humour to see it.

8 P.M.—I made a little more out of my work than I have made for a long while back: though even now I cannot make things fall into sentences—they only sprawl over the paper in bald orphan clauses. Then I was about in the afternoon with Baxter; and we had a good deal of fun, first rhyming on the names of all the shops we passed, and afterwards buying needles and quack drugs from open-air vendors, and taking much pleasure in their inexhaustible eloquence. Every now and then as we went, Arthur's Seat showed its head at the end of a street. Now, to-day the blue sky and the sunshine were both entirely wintry; and there was about the hill, in these glimpses, a sort of thin, unreal, crystalline distinctness that I have not often seen excelled. As the sun began to go down over the valley between the new town and the old, the evening grew resplendent; all the gardens and low-lying buildings sank back and became almost invisible in a mist of wonderful sun, and the Castle stood up against the sky, as thin and sharp in outline as a castle cut out of paper. Baxter made a good remark about Princes Street, that it was the most elastic street for length that he knew; sometimes it looks, as it looked to-night, interminable, a way leading right into the heart of the red sundown; sometimes, again, it shrinks together, as if for warmth, on one of the withering, clear east-windy days, until it seems to lie underneath your feet.

I want to let you see these verses from an *Ode to the Cuckoo*, written by one of the ministers of Leith in the middle of last century—the palmy days of Edinburgh—who was a friend of Hume and Adam Smith and the whole constellation. The authorship of these beautiful verses has been most truculently fought about; but whoever wrote them (and it seems as if this Logan had) they are lovely—

> "What time the pea puts on the bloom,
> Thou fliest the vocal vale,
> An annual guest, in other lands
> Another spring to hail.

"Sweet bird! thy bower is ever green,
Thy sky is ever clear;
Thou hast no sorrow in thy song,
No winter in thy year.

"O could I fly, I'd fly with thee!
We'd make on joyful wing
Our annual visit o'er the globe,
Companions of the spring."

*Sunday*.—I have been at church with my mother, where we heard "Arise, shine," sung excellently well, and my mother was so much upset with it that she nearly had to leave church. This was the antidote, however, to fifty minutes of solid sermon, varra heavy. I have been sticking in to Walt Whitman; nor do I think I have ever laboured so hard to attain so small a success. Still, the thing is taking shape, I think; I know a little better what I want to say all through; and in process of time possibly I shall manage to say it. I must say I am a very bad workman, *mais j'ai du courage :* I am indefatigable at rewriting and bettering, and surely that humble quality should get me on a little.

*Monday*, *October* 6.—It is a magnificent glimmering moonlight night, with a wild, great west wind abroad, flapping above one like an immense banner, and every now and again swooping furiously against my windows. The wind is too strong perhaps, and the trees are certainly too leafless for much of that wide rustle that we both remember; there is only a sharp, angry, sibilant hiss, like breath drawn with the strength of the elements through shut teeth, that one hears between the gusts only. I am in excellent humour with myself, for I have worked hard and not altogether fruitlessly; and I wished before I turned in just to tell you that things were so. My dear friend, I feel so happy when I think that you remember me kindly. I have been up to-night lecturing to a friend on life and duties and what a man could do; a coal off the altar had been laid on my lips, and I talked quite above my average, and hope I spread, what you would wish to see spread, into one person's heart; and with a new light upon it.

I shall tell you a story. Last Friday I went down to Portobello, in the heavy rain, with an uneasy wind blowing *par rafales* off the sea (or "*en rafales*" should it be? or what?) As I got down near the beach a poor woman, oldish, and seemingly, lately at least, respectable, followed me and made signs. She was drenched to the skin, and looked wretched below wretchedness. You know, I did not like to look back at her; it seemed as if she might misunderstand and be terribly hurt and slighted; so I stood at the end of the street—there was no one else within sight in the wet—and lifted up my hand very high with some money in it. I heard her steps draw heavily near behind me, and, when she was near enough to see, I let the money fall in the mud and went off at my best walk without ever turning round. There is nothing in the story; and yet you will understand how much there is, if one chose to set it forth. You see, she was so ugly; and you know there is something terribly, miserably pathetic in a certain smile, a certain sodden aspect of invitation on such faces. It is so terrible, that it is in a way sacred; it means the outside of degradation and (what is worst of all in life) false position. I hope you understand me rightly.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh*], *Tuesday, October* 14, 1873

My father has returned in better health, and I am more delighted than I can well tell you. The one trouble that I can see no way through is that his health, or my mother's, should give way. To-night, as I was walking along Princes Street, I heard the bugles sound the recall. I do not think I had ever remarked it before; there is something of unspeakable appeal in the cadence. I felt as if something yearningly cried to me out of the darkness overhead to come thither and find rest; one felt as if there must be

warm hearts and bright fires waiting for one up there, where the buglers stood on the damp pavement and sounded their friendly invitation forth into the night.

*Wednesday*.—I may as well tell you exactly about my health. I am not at all ill; have quite recovered; only I am what *MM. les médecins* call below par; which, in plain English, is that I am weak. With tonics, decent weather, and a little cheerfulness, that will go away in its turn, and I shall be all right again.

I am glad to hear what you say about the Exam.; until quite lately I have treated that pretty cavalierly, for I say honestly that I do not mind being plucked; I shall just have to go up again. We travelled with the Lord Advocate the other day, and he strongly advised me in my father's hearing to go to the English Bar; and the Lord Advocate's advice goes a long way in Scotland. It is a sort of special legal revelation. Don't misunderstand me. I don't, of course, want to be plucked; but so far as my style of knowledge suits them, I cannot make much betterment on it in a month. If they wish scholarship more exact, I must take a new lease altogether.

*Thursday*.—My head and eyes both gave in this morning, and I had to take a day of complete idleness. I was in the open air all day, and did no thought that I could avoid, and I think I have got my head between my shoulders again; however, I am not going to do much. I don't want you to run away with any fancy about my being ill. Given a person weak and in some trouble, and working longer hours than he is used to, and you have the matter in a nutshell. You should have seen the sunshine on the hill to-day; it has lost now that crystalline clearness, as if the medium were spring-water (you see, I am stupid !); but it retains that wonderful thinness of outline that makes the delicate shape and hue savour better in one's mouth, like fine wine out of a finely-blown glass. The birds are all silent now but the crows. I sat a long time on the stairs that lead down to Duddingston Loch—a place as busy as a great town during frost, but now solitary and silent; and when I shut my eyes I heard nothing but the wind in the trees; and you

know all that went through me, I daresay, without my saying it.

11.—I am now all right. I do not expect any tic to-night, and shall be at work again to-morrow. I have had a day of open air, only a little modified by *Le Capitaine Fracasse** before the dining-room fire. I must write no more, for I am sleepy after two nights, to quote my book, "*sinon blanches, du moins grises*"; and so I must go to bed and faithfully, hoggishly slumber.—

Your faithful

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To SIDNEY COLVIN

On the advice of the Lord Advocate it had been agreed that Stevenson should present himself for admission as a student at one of the London Inns of Court and should come to town after the middle of October to be examined for that purpose. The following two letters refer to this purpose and to the formalities required for effecting it :—

[*Edinburgh, Oct.* 15, 1873], *Wednesday*

MY DEAR COLVIN,—Of course I knew as well as you that I was merely running before an illness ; but I thought I should be in time to escape. However I was knocked over on Monday night with a bad sore throat, fever, rheumatism and a threatening of pleurisy, which last is, I think, gone. I still hope to be able to get away early next week, though I am not very clear as to how I shall manage the journey. If I don't get away on Wednesday at latest, I lose my excuse for going at all, and I do wish to escape a little while.

I shall see about the form when I get home, which I hope will be to-morrow (I was taken ill in a friend's house and have not yet been moved).

How could a broken-down engineer expect to make anything of *Roads?* Requiescant. When we get well (and if we get well), we shall do something better.—Yours sincerely,

R. L. STEVENSON.

Ye couche of pain.

* A burlesque romance by Théophile Gautier.

## To Sidney Colvin

[*Edinburgh, October* 16, 1873], *Thursday*

My dear Colvin,—I am at my wits' end about this abominable form of admission. I don't know what the devil it is ; I haven't got one even if I did, and so can't sign.

Monday night is the very earliest on which (even if I go on mending at the very great pace I have made already) I can hope to be in London myself. But possibly it is only intimation that requires to be made on Tuesday morning ; and one may possess oneself of a form of admission up to the eleventh hour. I send herewith a letter which I must ask you to cherish, as I count it a sort of talisman. Perhaps you may understand it, I don't.

If you don't understand it, please do not trouble and we must just hope that Tuesday morning will be early enough to do all. Of course I fear the exam. will spin me ; indeed after this bodily and spiritual crisis I should not dream of coming up at all ; only that I require it as a pretext for a moment's escape, which I want much.

I am so glad that *Roads* has got in. I had almost as soon have it in the *Portfolio* as the *Saturday ;* the *P.* is so nicely printed and I am *gourmet* in type. I don't know how to thank you for your continual kindness to me ; and I am afraid I do not even feel grateful enough—you have let your kindnesses come on me so easily.

Yours sincerely,

Louis Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

When Stevenson a few days later came to London, it was before the physicians and not the lawyers that he must present himself ; and the result of an examination by Sir Andrew Clark was his prompt and peremptory despatch to Mentone for a winter's rest and sunshine at a distance from all causes of mental agitation. This episode of his life gave occasion to the essay *Ordered South,* the only one of his writings in which he took the

invalid point of view or allowed his health troubles in any degree to colour his work. Travelling south by slow stages, he wrote on the way a long diary-letter from which extracts follow :—

[*London*], *Nov.* 4, 1873, 3.30

My dear Friend,—Clark is a trump. He said I must go abroad and that I was better alone. " Mothers," he said, " just put fancies into people's heads and make them fancy themselves worse than they are." My mother (with some justice) denied this soft impeachment. However, they are evidently bent on my return in six weeks at longest ; I hope they may find resignation, for methinks I shall manage to disappoint them. All seems to go well ; they are rather (I think) pleased than the reverse with what they have heard (I have only seen my mother) and the admirable placidity of their minds does not seem to be at all perturbed. I had a slight spar with my mother this afternoon about my movements to-morrow. She said " You shall not have everything your own way, I can tell you." I said " I don't expect it, but surely I may please myself as to where I am to sleep." She caved in incontinently and asked it as a favour, whereupon I facilely gave way and promised.

8.30.—Your note is come. Thanks. I go to-morrow to Dover. Thursday night I shall be in Paris ; Friday, Sens ; Saturday, Macon ; Sunday, Avignon. I should like a little note at Avignon. How difficult it is to write on paper that has been folded already. By the way, the whole scheme came out during dinner. I was to have been despatched to Torquay with my mother ; Clark disposed of all that at one breath ; they think no end of Clark.

Do keep well and be strong and jolly ; and let me hear that you are blooming. I do look forward to the sun and I go with a great store of contentment—bah ! what a mean word—of living happiness that I can scarce keep bottled down, in my weatherbeaten body. Do be happy.

Ever your faithful friend

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*Dover, Nov. 5th*

My dear Friend,—I came down to-day in company with a man who regaled me with the chronicle of accidents that had befallen him. He had broken in his time seven ribs, a collar bone, a leg and an arm, and seemed not one penny the worse. The country was very lovely, one grand spread of russet and green, and to the Medway, which accompanied us a little way, I quite lost my heart. To-night it blows most lamentably, and the noise of both wind and sea dins in my ears. I fear I shall not have a pleasant crossing.

My father was much delighted with you, as I knew of course he would be; but you and Colvin have so lamentably overdone your solemnity that you have given rise to an entirely new theory of my illness. I have been in "the very worst possible hands," my illness is almost entirely owing to your society; and so forth. Are they not perplexing people to deal with?

I have an article in my head which I think might do for the *Portfolio;* you see you always inspire me.

*Paris, November 6th.*—We had a very bad passage; there was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth all round me; the table in the centre of the cabin was overset and an avalanche of bags, camp-stools, coats, etc., was sent down to leeward, one heavy lurch, to the great discomfiture of many. I was not sick; wherefore I rejoiced greatly. I am very tired or I should have had a great deal to say to you. As it is I must just say what I *would* have said. I would have said a lot about the *smell* of foreign towns, which you will be able to supply; and a lot also about effects of poplars, which seem to me sometimes quite perfect, especially rivers winding hither and thither in a discreet diplomatic way and always between poplar colonnades. There were two English ladies in the carriage with me going to Italy under the guidance of a man; all three stolid, obtuse, and unemotional. It did make me angry to think that a third of the money that will be spent in hawking

these dull creatures through all that is sunny and beautiful would suffice to take you, with all your eager sensibilities and quick nerves.

It is not nine yet, and I am overcome with sleep. To-night I arrived tired in a great city after nightfall; and I did the same on the Saturday before last; only how different were the two arrivals! To-night I was going a stranger among strangers; and on Saturday I was coming *home*.

I went out and dined at a café and then smoked a pipe up and down the streets. It was cold a little but I could not resist the lights and the pleasant sound of the new language in my ears. McMahon's address is pasted up everywhere, and political pictures fill the windows.

I sleep ten and lie in bed twelve hours consistently. I have had breakfast and have just crawled upstairs to get a rest. My room is on the sixth floor, although they make it out to be the fourth floor only by dint of calling one the entresol and not calling another anything at all.

I just stop to remark upon French dogs, which seem to me more French considerably than the French people. They are charmingly national. I saw two to-day reading McMahon's message, or pretending to read it, with patriotic concern.

I am half in doubt whether I shall go on to-day or not but I shall if I am able. Paris is cold, and wearies me a little besides, and then I do wish to get settled and have my books and papers all about me once more and be able to write to you in comfort instead of shivering up here among the sparrows. I am very like a sparrow on the housetop, by the bye: by a peculiar disposition of the neighbouring roofs, the idea that one is in the open air is almost irresistibly forced upon one in this *numéro dix-ter*, and there is nothing in the temperature to belie it.

I am growing gradually more rested while I gossip with you. I wish to go to the Poste Restante, just *in case*, and thence to some good booksellers to inquire about a lot of books on the French Calvinists which are necessary to my little Covenanting game. It amuses me hugely to go on writing thus.

If I only were not tired I would write such lots ; but my spine is beginning to crawl. So goodbye,

R. L. STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*Avignon* [*November*, 1873]

I HAVE just read your letter upon the top of the hill beside the church and castle. The whole air was filled with sunset and the sound of bells ; and I wish I could give you the least notion of the *southernness* and *Provençality* of all that I saw.

I cannot write while I am travelling ; *c'est un défaut ;* but so it is. I must have a certain feeling of being at home, and my head must have time to settle. The new images oppress me, and I have a fever of restlessness on me. You must not be disappointed at such shabby letters ; and besides, remember my poor head and the fanciful crawling in the spine.

I am back again in the stage of thinking there is nothing the matter with me, which is a good sign ; but I am wretchedly nervous. Anything like rudeness I am simply babyishly afraid of ; and noises, and especially the sounds of certain voices, are the devil to me. A blind poet whom I found selling his immortal works in the streets of Sens, captivated me with the remarkable equable strength and sweetness of his voice, and I listened a long while and bought some of the poems, and now this voice, after I had thus got it thoroughly into my head, proved false metal and a really bad and horrible voice at bottom. It haunted me some time, but I think I am done with it now.

I hope you don't dislike reading bad style like this as much as I do writing it : it hurts me when neither words nor clauses fall into their places, much as it would hurt you to sing when you had a bad cold and your voice deceived you and missed every other note. I do feel so inclined to break the pen and write no more ; and here *à propos* begins my back.

*After dinner.*—It blows to-night from the north down the valley of the Rhone, and everything is so cold that I have been obliged to indulge in a fire. There is a fine crackle and roar of burning wood in the chimney which is very homely and companionable, though it does seem to postulate a town all white with snow outside.

I have bought Sainte-Beuve's *Chateaubriand* and am immensely delighted with the critic. Chateaubriand is more antipathetic to me than any one else in the world.

I begin to wish myself arrived to-night. Travelling, when one is not quite well, has a good deal of unpleasantness. One is easily upset by cross incidents, and wants that *belle humeur* and spirit of adventure that makes a pleasure out of what is unpleasant.

*Tuesday, November 11th.*—There! There's a date for you. I shall be in Mentone for my birthday, with plenty of nice letters to read. I went away across the Rhone and up the hill on the other side that I might see the town from a distance. Avignon followed me with its bells and drums and bugles; for the old city has no equal for multitude of such noises. Crossing the bridge and seeing the brown turbid water foam and eddy about the piers, one could scarce believe one's eyes when one looked down upon the stream and saw the smooth blue mirroring trees and hill. Over on the other side, the sun beat down so furiously on the white road that I was glad to keep in the shadow and, when the occasion offered, to turn aside among the olive-yards. It was nine years and six months since I had been in an olive-yard. I found myself much changed, not so gay, but wiser and more happy. I read your letter again, and sat a while looking down over the tawny plain and at the fantastic outline of the city. The hills seemed just fainting into the sky, even the great peak above Carpentras (Lord knows how many metres above the sea) seemed unsubstantial and thin in the breadth and potency of the sunshine.

I should like to stay longer here but I can't. I am driven forward by restlessness, and leave this afternoon about two. I am just going out now to visit again the church, castle,

and hill, for the sake of the magnificent panorama, and besides, because it is the friendliest spot in all Avignon to me.

*Later.*—You cannot picture to yourself anything more steeped in hard bright sunshine than the view from the hill. The immovable inky shadow of the old bridge on the fleeting surface of the yellow river seemed more solid than the bridge itself. Just in the place where I sat yesterday evening a shaven man in a velvet cap was studying music—evidently one of the singers for *La Muette de Portici* at the theatre to-night. I turned back as I went away : the white Christ stood out in strong relief on his brown cross against the blue sky, and the four kneeling angels and lanterns grouped themselves about the foot with a symmetry that was almost laughable ; the musician read on at his music, and counted time with his hand on the stone step.

*Mentone, November 12th.*—My first enthusiasm was on rising at Orange and throwing open the shutters. Such a great living flood of sunshine poured in upon me, that I confess to having danced and expressed my satisfaction aloud ; in the middle of which the boots came to the door with hot water, to my great confusion.

To-day has been one long delight, coming to a magnificent climax on my arrival here. I gave up my baggage to an hotel porter and set off to walk at once. I was somewhat confused as yet as to my directions, for the station of course was new to me, and the hills had not sufficiently opened out to let me recognise the peaks. Suddenly, as I was going forward slowly in this confusion of mind, I was met by a great volley of odours out of the lemon and orange gardens, and the past linked on to the present, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the whole scene fell before me into order, and I was at home. I nearly danced again.

I suppose I must send off this to-night to notify my arrival in safety and good-humour and, I think, in good health, before relapsing into the old weekly vein. I hope this time to send you a weekly dose of sunshine from the south, instead of the jet of *snell* Edinburgh east wind that used to was.—Ever your faithful friend, R. L. S.

To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

*Hôtel du Pavillon, Mentone*
*November* 13, 1873

My dear Mother,—The *Place* is not where I thought; it is about where the old Post Office was. The Hôtel de Londres is no more an hotel. I have found a charming room in the Hôtel du Pavillon, just across the road from the Prince's Villa; it has one window to the south and one to the east, with a superb view of Mentone and the hills, to which I move this afternoon. In the old great *Place* there is a kiosque for the sale of newspapers; a string of omnibuses (perhaps thirty) go up and down under the plane-trees of the Turin Road on the occasion of each train; the Promenade has crossed both streams, and bids fair to reach the Cap Martin. The old chapel near Freeman's house at the entrance to the Gorbio valley is now entirely submerged under a shining new villa, with pavilion annexed; over which, in all the pride of oak and chestnut and divers coloured marbles, I was shown this morning by the obliging proprietor. The Prince's Palace itself is rehabilitated, and shines afar with white window-curtains from the midst of a garden, all trim borders and greenhouses and carefully kept walks. On the other side, the villas are more thronged together, and they have arranged themselves, shelf after shelf, behind each other. I see the glimmer of new buildings, too, as far eastward as Grimaldi; and a viaduct carries (I suppose) the railway past the mouth of the bone caves. F. Bacon (Lord Chancellor) made the remark that "Time was the greatest innovator"; it is perhaps as meaningless a remark as was ever made; but as Bacon made it, I suppose it is better than any that I could make. Does it not seem as if things were fluid? They are displaced and altered in ten years so that one has difficulty, even with a memory so very vivid and retentive for that sort of thing as mine, in identifying places where one lived a long while in the past, and which one has kept piously in mind during all the interval. Nevertheless, the hills, I am glad to say, are unaltered; though I dare say the torrents have given them

many a shrewd scar, and the rains and thaws dislodged many a boulder from their heights, if one were only keen enough to perceive it. The sea makes the same noise in the shingle ; and the lemon and orange gardens still discharge in the still air their fresh perfume ; and the people have still brown comely faces ; and the Pharmacie Gros still dispenses English medicines ; and the invalids (eheu !) still sit on the promenade and trifle with their fingers in the fringes of shawls and wrappers ; and the shop of Pascal Amarante still, in its present bright consummate flower of aggrandisement and new paint, offers everything that it has entered into people's hearts to wish for in the idleness of a sanatorium, and the " Château des Morts " is still at the top of the town ; and the fort and the jetty are still at the foot, only there are now two jetties ; and—I am out of breath. (To be continued in our next.)

For myself, I have come famously through the journey ; and as I have written this letter (for the first time for ever so long) with ease and even pleasure, I think my head must be better. I am still no good at coming down hills or stairs ; and my feet are more consistently cold than is quite comfortable. But, these apart, I feel well ; and in good spirits all round.

I have written to Nice for letters, and hope to get them to-night. Continue to address Poste Restante. Take care of yourselves.

This is my birthday, by the way—O, I said that before. Adieu.—Ever your affectionate son,

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*Mentone, November* 13, 1873

I MUST pour out my disgust at the absence of a letter ; my birthday nearly gone, and devil a letter—I beg pardon. After all, now I think of it, it is only a week since I left.

I have here the nicest room in Mentone. Let me ex-

plain. Ah! there's the bell for the *table d'hôte*. Now to see if there is any one conversable within these walls.

In the interval my letters have come; none from you, but one from Bob, which both pained and pleased me. He cannot get on without me at all, he writes; he finds that I have been the whole world for him; that he only talked to other people in order that he might tell me afterwards about the conversation. Should I—I really don't know quite what to feel; I am so much astonished, and almost more astonished that he should have expressed it than that he should feel it; he never would have *said* it, I know. I feel a strange sense of weight and responsibility. Ever your faithful friend,

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

In the latter part of this letter will be found the germ of the essay, *Ordered South*.

*Mentone, Sunday* [*November* 23, 1873]

My dear Friend,—I sat a long while up among the olive yards to-day at a favourite corner, where one has a fair view down the valley and on to the blue floor of the sea. I had a Horace with me, and read a little; but Horace, when you try to read him fairly under the open heaven, sounds urban, and you find something of the escaped townsman in his descriptions of the country, just as somebody said that Morris's sea-pieces were all taken from the coast. I tried for long to hit upon some language that might catch ever so faintly the indefinable shifting colour of olive leaves; and, above all, the changes and little silverings that pass over them, like blushes over a face, when the wind tosses great branches to and fro; but the Muse was not favourable. A few birds scattered here and there at wide intervals on either side of the valley sang the little broken songs of late autumn; and there was a great stir of insect life in the grass at my feet. The path up to this coign of vantage, where I think I shall make it a habit to ensconce myself a while of a

morning, is for a little while common to the peasant and a little clear brooklet. It is pleasant, in the tempered grey daylight of the olive shadows, to see the people picking their way among the stones and the water and the brambles ; the women especially, with the weights poised on their heads and walking all from the hips with a certain graceful deliberation.

*Tuesday*.—I have been to Nice to-day to see Dr. Bennet ; he agrees with Clark that there is no disease ; but I finished up my day with a lamentable exhibition of weakness. I could not remember French, or at least I was afraid to go into any place lest I should not be able to remember it, and so could not tell when the train went. At last I crawled up to the station and sat down on the steps, and just steeped myself there in the sunshine until the evening began to fall and the air to grow chilly. This long rest put me all right ; and I came home here triumphantly and ate dinner well. There is the full, true, and particular account of the worst day I have had since I left London. I shall not go to Nice again for some time to come.

*Thursday*.—I am to-day quite recovered, and got into Mentone to-day for a book, which is quite a creditable walk. As an intellectual being I have not yet begun to re-exist ; my immortal soul is very nearly extinct ; but we must hope the best. Now, do take warning by me. I am set up by a beneficent providence at the corner of the road, to warn you to flee from the hebetude that is to follow. Being sent to the South is not much good unless you take your soul with you, you see ; and my soul is rarely with me here. I don't see much beauty. I have lost the key ; I can only be placid and inert, and see the bright days go past uselessly one after another ; therefore don't talk foolishly with your mouth any more about getting liberty by being ill and going south *via* the sickbed. It is not the old freeborn bird that gets thus to freedom ; but I know not what manacled and hidebound spirit, incapable of pleasure, the clay of a man. Go south ! Why, I saw more beauty with my eyes healthfully alert to see in two wet windy February afternoons in Scotland than I can see in my beautiful olive

gardens and grey hills in a whole week in my low and lost estate, as the Shorter Catechism puts it somewhere. It is a pitiable blindness, this blindness of the soul; I hope it may not be long with me. So remember to keep well; and remember rather anything than not to keep well; and again I say, *anything* rather than not to keep well.

Not that I am unhappy, mind you. I have found the words already—placid and inert, that is what I am. I sit in the sun and enjoy the tingle all over me, and I am cheerfully ready to concur with any one who says that this is a beautiful place, and I have a sneaking partiality for the newspapers, which would be all very well, if one had not fallen from heaven and were not troubled with some reminiscence of the *ineffable aurore*.

To sit by the sea and to be conscious of nothing but the sound of the waves, and the sunshine over all your body, is not unpleasant; but I was an Archangel once.

*Friday*.—If you knew how old I felt! I am sure this is what age brings with it—this carelessness, this disenchantment, this continual bodily weariness. I am a man of seventy: O Medea, kill me, or make me young again! *

To-day has been cloudy and mild; and I have lain a great while on a bench outside the garden wall (my usual place now) and looked at the dove-coloured sea and the broken roof of cloud, but there was no seeing in my eye. Let us hope to-morrow will be more profitable.

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The history of the scruples and ideas of duty in regard to money here expressed is set forth and further explained in retrospect in the fragment called *Lay Morals*, written in 1879. The Walt Whitman essay is not that afterwards printed in *Men and Books*, but an earlier and more enthusiastic version. Mr. Dowson, I believe, was the father of the unfortunate poet, the late Mr.

* Compare the paragraph in *Ordered South* describing the state of mind of the invalid doubtful of recovery, and ending: "He will pray for Medea; when she comes, let her either rejuvenate or slay."

Ernest Dowson. His acquaintance was the first result of Stevenson's search for " any one conversable " in the hotel.

*Mentone, Sunday* [*November* 30, 1873]

MY DEAR FRIEND,—To-day is as hot as it has been in the sun ; and as I was a little tired and seedy, I went down and just drank in sunshine. A strong wind has risen out of the west ; the great big dead leaves from the roadside planes scuttled about and chased one another over the gravel round me with a noise like little waves under the keel of a boat, and jumped up sometimes on to my lap and into my face. I lay down on my back at last, and looked up into the sky. The white corner of the hotel with a wide projection at the top, stood out in dazzling relief ; and there was nothing else, save a few of the plane leaves that had got up wonderfully high and turned and eddied and flew here and there like little pieces of gold leaf, to break the extraordinary sea of blue. It was bluer than anything in the world here ; wonderfully blue, and looking deeply peaceful, although in truth there was a high wind blowing.

I am concerned about the plane leaves. Hitherto it has always been a great feature to see these trees standing up head and shoulders and chest—head and body, in fact—above the wonderful blue-grey-greens of the olives, in one glory of red gold. Much more of this wind, and the gold, I fear, will be all spent.

9.20.—I must write you another little word. I have found here a new friend, to whom I grow daily more devoted—George Sand. I go on from one novel to another and think the last I have read the most sympathetic and friendly in tone, until I have read another. It is a life in dreamland. Have you read *Mademoiselle Merquem ?*

*Monday*.—I did not quite know last night what to say to you about *Mdlle. Merquem.* If you want to be unpleasantly moved, read it.

I am gloomy and out of spirits to-night in consequence of a ridiculous scene at the *table d'hôte*, where a parson whom I rather liked took offence at something I said and we had almost a quarrel. It was mopped up and stifled, like spilt wine with a napkin ; but it leaves an unpleasant impression.

I have again ceased all work, because I felt that it strained my head a little, and so I have resumed the tedious task of waiting with folded hands for better days. But thanks to George Sand and the sunshine, I am very jolly.

That last word was so much out of key that I could sit no longer, and went away to seek out my clergyman and apologise to him. He was gone to bed. I don't know what makes me take this so much to heart. I suppose it's nerves or pride or something ; but I am unhappy about it. I am going to drown my sorrows in *Consuelo* and burn some incense in my pipe to the god of Contentment and Forgetfulness.

I do not know, but I hope, if I can only get better, I shall be a help to you soon in every way and no more a trouble and burthen. All my difficulties about life have so cleared away ; the scales have fallen from my eyes, and the broad road of my duty lies out straight before me without cross or hindrance. I have given up all hope, all fancy rather, of making literature my hold : I see that I have not capacity enough. My life shall be, if I can make it, my only business. I am desirous to practise now, rather than to preach, for I know that I should ever preach badly, and men can more easily forgive faulty practice than dull sermons. If Colvin does not think that I shall be able to support myself soon by literature, I shall give it up and go (horrible as the thought is to me) into an office of some sort : the first and main question is, that I must live by my own hands ; after that come the others.

You will not regard me as a madman, I am sure. It is a very rational aberration at least to try to put your beliefs into practice. Strangely enough, it has taken me a long time to see this distinctly with regard to my whole creed ; but I have seen it at last, praised be my sickness and my leisure ! I have seen it at last ; the sun of my duty has risen ; I have enlisted for the first time, and after long coquetting with the shilling, under the banner of the Holy Ghost ! *

8.15.—If you had seen the moon last night ! It was like transfigured sunshine ; as clear and mellow, only showing

* Alluding to Heine's *Ritter von dem heiligen Geist.*

everything in a new wonderful significance. The shadows of the leaves on the road were so strangely black that Dowson and I had difficulty in believing that they were not solid, or at least pools of dark mire. And the hills and the trees, and the white Italian houses with lit windows! O! nothing could bring home to you the keenness and the reality and the wonderful *Unheimlichkeit* of all these. When the moon rises every night over the Italian coast, it makes a long path over the sea as yellow as gold.

How I happened to be out in the moonlight yesterday, was that Dowson and I spent the evening with an odd man called Bates, who played Italian music to us with great feeling; all which was quite a dissipation in my still existence.

*Friday.*—I cannot endure to be dependent much longer, it stops my mouth. Something I must find shortly. I mean when I am able for anything. However I am much better already; and have been writing not altogether my worst although not very well. Walt Whitman is stopped. I have bemired it so atrociously by working at it when I was out of humour that I must let the colour dry; and alas! what I have been doing in its place doesn't seem to promise any money. However, it is all practice and it interests myself extremely. I have now received £80, some £55 of which still remain; all this is more debt to civilisation and my fellowmen. When shall I be able to pay it back? You do not know how much this money question begins to take more and more importance in my eyes every day. It is an old phrase of mine that money is the *atmosphere* of civilised life, and I do hate to take the breath out of other people's nostrils. I live here at the rate of more than £3 a week and I do nothing for it. If I didn't hope to get well and do good work yet and more than repay my debts to the world, I should consider it right to invest an extra franc or two in laudanum. But I *will* repay it.—Always your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

Concerning the allusions in the following,—of the "row with the V. D." I know nothing, nor yet of Wilson nor Bisset: the Andrews's were a cultivated, very friendly American couple, the gentleman much of an invalid: the Romanes's a wealthy and rigidly pious Edinburgh couple, the parents of a son who did not follow in their footsteps and of whose escapades there were long current many anecdotes.

[*Mentone*], *Saturday, Dec.* 14/73

My dear Mother,—I am sorry you were so long without hearing that time and I have a difficulty in understanding that it could have been so long; I suspect some letter must have mis-carried. You never tell me how you keep either of you; and you never tell me how that row with V. D. goes on or has ended.

I am really very much better, quite beginning to come round again. To-day, however, you must excuse me from writing more than a line or two, because I took tea yesterday at the Andrews's, was awake in consequence almost all night and have a good deal of tic to-day. You see the consequence of breaking rules; and yet day and night you do not cease to incite me to break them more! C'est pas joli. I lunched yesterday with the Dewars (heavy) and spent the afternoon with the Andrews's—it was their receiving day. I like the Andrews's very much now.

To-day I called on the Romanes's and found only Mrs. R; she talked religion to me for some time and then I went away again. She was not very inviting and I do not think I shall build myself a lodge in their garden. Their house is appropriately called the Villa Sahara.

O—if you can learn Wilson's address in Aberdeen, send him one of the papers and send me the address. Send Bisset a Thermal I: also.

I expect Colvin shortly.

Ever afft. son,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

Tell Cummy I recognised her hand on a *Glasgow News* and that I'll write to her shortly.

R. L. S.

## To Charles Baxter

[*Mentone, December,* 1873]

My dear Baxter,—At last, I must write. I must say straight out that I am not recovering as I could wish. I am no stronger than I was when I came here, and I pay for every walk, beyond say a quarter of a mile in length, by one or two, or even three, days of more or less prostration. Therefore let nobody be down upon me for not writing. I was very thankful to you for answering my letter; and for the princely action of Simpson in writing to me, I mean before I had written to him, I was ditto to an almost higher degree. I hope one or another of you will write again soon; and, remember, I still live in hope of reading Grahame Murray's address.

I have not made a joke, upon my living soul, since I left London. O! except one, a very small one, that I had made before, and that I very timidly repeated in a half-exhilarated state towards the close of dinner, like one of those dead-alive flies, that we see pretending to be quite light and full of frivolity of youth in the first sunshiny days. It was about mothers' meetings, and it was damned small, and it was my ewe lamb—the Lord knows, I couldn't have made another to save my life—and a clergyman quarrelled with me, and there was as nearly an explosion as could be. This has not fostered my leaning towards pleasantry. I felt that it was a very cold, hard world that night.

My dear Charles, is the sky blue at Mentone? Was that your question? Well, it depends upon what you call blue; it's a question of taste, I suppose. Is the sky blue? You poor critter, you never saw blue sky worth being called blue in the same day with it. And I should rather fancy that the sun did shine I should. And the moon doesn't shine either. O no! (This last is sarcastic.) Mentone is one of the most beautiful places in the world, and has always had a very warm corner in my heart since first I knew it eleven years ago.

11*th December*.—I live in the same hotel with Lord X. He has black whiskers, and has been successful in raising

some kids ; rather a melancholy success ; they are weedy looking kids in Highland clo'. They have a tutor with them who respires Piety and that kind of humble your-lordship's-most-obedient sort of gentlemanliness that noblemen's tutors have generally. They all get livings, these men, and silvery hair and a gold watch from their attached pupil ; and they sit in the porch and make the watch repeat for their little grandchildren, and tell them long stories, beginning, " When I was private tutor in the family of," etc., and the grandchildren cock snooks at them behind their backs and go away whenever they can to get the groom to teach them bad words.

Sidney Colvin will arrive here on Saturday or Sunday ; so I shall have some one to jaw with. And, seriously, this is a great want. I have not been all these weeks in idleness, as you may fancy, without much thinking as to my future ; and I have a great deal in view that may or may not be possible (that I do not yet know), but that is at least an object and a hope before me. I cannot help recurring to seriousness a moment before I stop ; for I must say that living here a good deal alone, and having had ample time to look back upon my past, I have become very serious all over. If I can only get back my health, by God ! I shall not be as useless as I have been.—Ever yours, *mon vieux*,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Mentone, December*, 1873], *Sunday*

THE first violet. There is more sweet trouble for the heart in the breath of this small flower than in all the wines of all the vineyards of Europe. I cannot contain myself. I do not think so small a thing has ever given me such a princely festival of pleasure. I feel as if my heart were a little bunch of violets in my bosom ; and my brain is pleasantly intoxicated with the wonderful odour. I suppose I am writing nonsense, but it does not seem nonsense to me. Is it not a wonderful odour ? is it not something

incredibly subtle and perishable ? It is like a wind blowing to one out of fairyland. No one need tell me that the phrase is exaggerated if I say that this violet *sings ;* it sings with the same voice as the March blackbird ; and the same adorable tremor goes through one's soul at the hearing of it.

*Monday*.—All yesterday I was under the influence of opium. I had been rather seedy during the night and took a dose in the morning, and for the first time in my life it took effect upon me. I had a day of extraordinary happiness ; and when I went to bed there was something almost terrifying in the pleasures that besieged me in the darkness. Wonderful tremors filled me ; my head swam in the most delirious but enjoyable manner ; and the bed softly oscillated with me, like a boat in a very gentle ripple. It does not make me write a good style apparently, which is just as well, lest I should be tempted to renew the experiment ; and some verses which I wrote turn out on inspection to be not quite equal to *Kubla Khan*. However, I was happy, and the recollection is not troubled by any reaction this morning.

*Wednesday*.—Do you know, I think I am much better. I really enjoy things, and I really feel dull occasionally, neither of which was possible with me before ; and though I am still tired and weak, I almost think I feel a stirring among the dry bones. O, I should like to recover, and be once more well and happy and fit for work ! And then to be able to begin really to my life ; to have done, for the rest of time, with preluding and doubting ; and to take hold of the pillars strongly with Samson—to burn my ships with (whoever did it). O, I begin to feel my spirits come back to me again at the thought !

*Thursday*.—I sat along the beach this morning under some reeds (or canes—I know not which they are) : everything was so tropical ; nothing visible but the glaring white shingle, the blue sea, the blue sky, and the green plumes of the canes thrown out against the latter some ten or fifteen feet above my head. The noise of the surf alone broke the quiet. I had somehow got *Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh* into

my head ; and I was happy for I do not know how long, sitting there and repeating to myself these lines. It is wonderful how things somehow fall into a full satisfying harmony, and out of the fewest elements there is established a sort of small perfection. It was so this morning. I did not want anything further.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

In the third week of December I went out to join my friend for a part of the Christmas vacation, and found him without tangible disease, but very weak and ailing ; ill-health and anxiety, however, neither then nor at any time diminished his charm as a companion. He left Mentone to meet me at the old town of Monaco, where we spent a few days and from whence the next three letters were written.

*Monaco, Monday, Dec.* 17, 1873

My dear Madame,—I am here now with Colvin. Weather as before. Body as before. I shall dine to-morrow, I believe, with the notorious Sir Charles Dilke, who is here and whom Colvin had to see on business. I am happy to inform you that Mentone—Bennet said nothing could be worse for me than wine, except music and things of that sort. He said

*Tuesday*.—I don't remember what I was going to say. We have just come back from dining with the Dilkes ; where we had a very good dinner and very good wine. Lady Dilke is a first-rate mimic and has a waiting-maid who is Scotch and not unlike some of our friends in character over whom she made great running.

*Wednesday*.—I can't say that Colvin's arrival seems to make me much more of a correspondent. Just then we got talking and wrote no more till it was time to go to bed. We have very nice rooms here near Monte Carlo ; so that we have the gardens at hand and can go and bake ourselves under the palms at a moment's notice. You don't seem to have written me for some days now ; not that I complain, understand ; I am only wondering at the two phenomena. Last week's letter any day and the compara-

tive silence of this week. Colvin and I are to go to the Andrews's on Christmas day, breakfast and then a " tree " in the afternoon.

I must finish this off and get the post or you will be growing impatient. I am really well pleased with my progress just now. I am less tired and dispirited than I was by a good way ; and, of course, Colvin's being with me is a great amusement. I think you would like Monaco, they are very strict and make you sign a paper—" nom de famille—Prénoms—Âge—Qualité ou Profession—lieu de naissance—dernière demeure—domicile habituel." That is rather hot, is it not ? Hullo. Time flies.

Your afft. son
R. L. Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*Monaco, Tuesday* [*December*, 1873]

We have been out all day in a boat ; lovely weather and almost dead calm, only the most infinitesimal and indeterminate of oscillations moved us hither and thither ; the sails were duly set, and flapped about idly overhead. Our boatman was a man of a delightful humour, who told us many tales of the sea, notably one of a doctor who was an Englishman, and who seemed almost an epitome of vices—drunken, dishonest, and utterly without faith ; and yet he was a *charmant garçon*. He told us many amusing circumstances of the doctor's incompetence and dishonesty, and imitated his accent with a singular success. I couldn't quite see that he was a charming *garçon*—" *O, oui—comme caractère, un charmant garçon.*" We landed on that Cap Martin, the place of firs and rocks and myrtle and rosemary of which I spoke to you. As we pulled along in the fresh shadow, the wonderfully clean scents blew out upon us, as if from islands of spice—only how much better than cloves and cinnamon !

*Friday*.—Colvin and I are sitting on a seat on the battlemented gardens of Old Monaco. The day is grey and

clouded, with a little red light on the horizon, and the sea, hundreds of feet below us, is a sort of purple dove-colour. Shrub-geraniums, firs, and aloes cover all available shelves and terraces, and where these become impossible, the prickly pear precipitates headlong downwards its bunches of oval plates; so that the whole face of the cliff is covered with an arrested fall (please excuse clumsy language), a sort of fall of the evil angels petrified midway on its career. White gulls sail past below us every now and then, sometimes singly, sometimes by twos and threes, and sometimes in a great flight. The sharp perfume of the shrub-geraniums fills the air.

I cannot write, in any sense of the word; but I am as happy as can be, and wish to notify the fact, before it passes. The sea is blue, grey, purple, and green; very subdued and peaceful; earlier in the day it was marbled by small keen specks of sun and larger spaces of faint irradiation; but the clouds have closed together now, and these appearances are no more. Voices of children and occasional crying of gulls; the mechanical noise of a gardener somewhere behind us in the scented thicket; and the faint report and rustle of the waves on the precipice far below, only break in upon the quietness to render it more complete and perfect.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

*Monte Carlo, Thursday* [*Christmas* 1873-4]

MY DEAR MOTHER,—Colvin has gone walking to Mentone to cash draughts, as we had become penniless. I am sitting on a seat on the low terrace at Monte Carlo; the sea shining in front; on the right old Monaco; on the left Roccabruna, Cap St. Martin, and the Italian coast; behind me a border full of bees, a wall covered with green creepers and a great clump of palms and aloes. One—no, two aloes are in wonderful flower twenty feet high if they are an inch and standing over the palms by a foot or two.

Last night it had rained and the air this morning is exceptionally soft and pure, and the sun is a little veiled. Drums and trumpets come to me very faintly from the old town ; the Carabiniers of Charles the Third are turning out, or changing guard or something. You remember these Carabiniers of yore, do you not ? I think there are more of them now ; they are very likely paid by Blanc, and not by Charles Trois. À propos (information crowds upon me) Charles Trois is blind and Blanc employs a thousand persons at Monte Carlo. Blanc you know is the ex-King of Homburg ? Each of his daughters will have half a million (English). Both the Kings of Monaco (Blanc and Charles Trois) have châteaux in Normandy. I owe all of this gossip to two sources, somewhat different—a charming French boatman and Lady Dilke.

Colvin being here is certainly a great improvement, and I have been more jocular than I have been for long. The standing——

*Friday*.—It is difficult to take up one's thread again ; don't let us try. To-day, we have spent the day in old Monaco, breakfasting at a hotel on the Place. The day was quite clouded over : but wonderfully soft and warm. One of those days of quiet irradiated light that are lavished upon us in England and for which we are so little thankful. I recollected having been there over eleven years ago, and my father throwing stones over the cliff and making me calculate the height. I think I spotted the old Casino. It is to let. The gardens on the edge of the cliff are superlatively delightful and we half think of moving up there away from the bands and gas jets and equivocal company of Monte Carlo. Nothing will reconcile Colvin to the Casino on the Riviera ; I speak the words of wisdom continually and say that it is a very nice Casino, as a Casino, and that the gardens are nice ; but the pigeon-shooting is certainly horrid to behold and the importunate noise of the guns pervades the garden all afternoon. I am glad you liked *Roads*. I am sleepy and must to bed.

Ever afft. son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

After spending a few days in one of the more retired hotels of Monte Carlo, we went on to Mentone and settled at the Hotel Mirabeau, long since, I believe, defunct, near the eastern extremity of the town. The little American girl mentioned in the last paragraph is the same we shall meet later under her full name of Marie Johnstone.

[*Hotel Mirabeau*], *Mentone, January 2nd,* 1874

Here I am over in the east bay of Mentone, where I am not altogether sorry to find myself. I move so little that I soon exhaust the immediate neighbourhood of my dwelling places. Our reason for coming here was however very simple. Hobson's choice. Mentone during my absence has filled marvellously.

Continue to address P. R.* Mentone; and try to conceive it as possible that I am not a drivelling idiot. When I wish an address changed, it is quite on the cards that I shall be able to find language explicit enough to express the desire. My whole desire is to avoid complication of addresses. It is quite fatal. If two P. R.'s have contradictory orders they will continue to play battledoor and shuttlecock with an unhappy epistle, which will never get farther afield but perish there miserably.

You act too much on the principle that whatever I do is done unwisely; and that whatever I do not, has been culpably forgotten. This is wounding to my nat'ral vanity.

I have not written for three days I think; but what days! They were very cold; and I must say I was able thoroughly to appreciate the blessings of Mentone. Old Smoko this winter would evidently have been very summary with me. I could not stand the cold at all. I exhausted all my own and all Colvin's clothing; I then retired to the house, and then to bed; in a condition of sorrow for myself unequalled. The sun is forth again (laus Deo) and the wind is milder, and I am greatly re-established. A certain asperity of

* *Poste Restante.*

temper still lingers, however, which Colvin supports with much mildness.

In this hotel, I have a room on the first floor ! Luxury, however, is not altogether regardless of expense. We only pay 13 francs per day—3½ more than at the Pavillon on the third floor.—And beggars must not be choosers. We were very nearly houseless, the night we came. And it is rarely that such winds of adversity blow men into kings' Palaces.

Looking over what has gone before, it seems to me that it is not strictly polite. I beg to withdraw all that is offensive.

At *table d'hôte*, we have some people who amuse us much ; two Americans, who would try to pass for French people, and their daughter, the most charming of little girls. Both Colvin and I have planned an abduction already. The whole hotel is devoted to her ; and the waiters continually do smuggle out comfits and fruit and pudding to her.

All well.—Ever your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

The M'Laren herein mentioned was the distinguished Scotch politician and social reformer, Duncan M'Laren, for sixteen years M.P. for Edinburgh.

[*Mentone*], *Sunday, January* 4, 1874

MY DEAR MOTHER,—We have here fallen on the very pink of hotels. I do not say that it is more pleasantly conducted than the Pavillon, for that were impossible ; but the rooms are so cheery and bright and new, and then the food ! I never, I think, so fully appreciated the phrase " the fat of the land," as I have done since I have been here installed. There was a dish of eggs at *déjeuner* the other day, over the memory of which I lick my lips in the silent watches.

Now that the cold has gone again, I continue to keep well in body, and already I begin to walk a little more. My head is still a very feeble implement, and easily set a-

spinning ; and I can do nothing in the way of work beyond reading books that may, I hope, be of some use to me afterwards.

I was very glad to see that M'Laren was sat upon, and principally for the reason why. Deploring as I do much of the action of the Trades Unions, these conspiracy clauses and the whole partiality of the Master and Servant Act are a disgrace to our equal laws. Equal laws become a byword when what is legal for one class becomes a criminal offence for another. It did my heart good to hear that man tell M'Laren how, as he had talked much of getting the franchise for working men, he must now be content to see them use it now they had got it. This is a smooth stone well planted in the foreheads of certain dilettanti radicals, after M'Laren's fashion, who are willing to give the working men words and wind, and votes and the like, and yet think to keep all the advantages, just or unjust, of the wealthier classes without abatement. I do hope wise men will not attempt to fight the working men on the head of this notorious injustice. Any such step will only precipitate the action of the newly enfranchised classes, and irritate them into acting hastily ; when what we ought to desire should be that they should act warily and little for many years to come, until education and habit may make them the more fit.

All this (intended for my father) is much after the fashion of his own correspondence. I confess it has left my own head exhausted ; I hope it may not produce the same effect on yours. But I want him to look really into this question (both sides of it, and not the representations of rabid middle-class newspapers, sworn to support all the little tyrannies of wealth), and I know he will be convinced that this is a case of unjust law ; and that, however desirable the end may seem to him, he will not be Jesuit enough to think that any end will justify an unjust law.

Here ends the political sermon of your affectionate (and somewhat dogmatical) son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

In the first week of January I went for some necessary work to Paris, with the intention of rejoining my friend towards the end of the month. The following letter introduces the Russian sisters, Madame Zassetsky and Madame Garschine, whose society and that of their children was to do so much to cheer Stevenson during his remaining months on the Riviera. Such society was entirely new to him, nor had Russian character and manners been illuminated for English readers then, as they have been now, by scores of famous translated novels and others, scarcely less remarkable, by English students of the country. Of these two ladies of the Russian aristocracy, his elders by some fifteen or more years, the senior and more dashing, Mme. Z., it presently appeared, had a standing *liaison* of her own at home. Her gentler sister, Mme. G., was unattached, and soon began to take an interest in Stevenson which, as will be seen by the innocent confessions of the following letters, he feared for a while might be tenderer than he was prepared to reciprocate. But their relations presently quieted down into those of a comfortable and mutually interesting friendship—for to these Russian ladies this brilliant and bashful Scottish youth afforded a study quite as new as that which they presented to him. Of the two children mentioned, one, Pella, was a girl of some seven or eight, of no particular interest; Nelitchka, a two-year-old or little more, was of a childish charm which gave Stevenson endless delight. Which sister was the mother of which child, or of both, was a mystery he was never allowed to solve. The "Robinet" mentioned in this letter was a bush-bearded French landscape painter, sometimes known as "le Raphaël des cailloux" from the more than pre-Raphaelite minuteness of his treatment of the foreground detail of pebbled shores; a devout Catholic and reactionary, and withal the best of genial good fellows.

[*Mentone*], *January* 7, 1874

My dear Mother,—I received yesterday two most charming letters—the nicest I have had since I left—December 26th and January 1st: this morning I got January 3rd.

Into the bargain with Marie, the American girl, who is grace itself, and comes leaping and dancing simply like a wave—like nothing else, and who yesterday was Queen out of the Epiphany cake, and chose Robinet (the French painter) as her *favori* with the most pretty confusion possible—into the bargain with Marie, we have two little Russian girls, with the youngest of whom, a little polyglot

button of a three-year old, I had the most laughable little scene at lunch to-day. I was watching her being fed with great amusement, her face being as broad as it is long, and her mouth capable of unlimited extension ; when suddenly, her eye catching mine, the fashion of her countenance was changed, and regarding me with a really admirable appearance of offended dignity, she said something in Italian which made everybody laugh much. It was explained to me that she had said I was very *polisson* to stare at her. After this she was somewhat taken up with me, and after some examination she announced emphatically to the whole table, in German, that I was a *Mädchen ;* which word she repeated with shrill emphasis, as though fearing that her proposition would be called in question—*Mädchen*, *Mädchen*, *Mädchen*, *Mädchen*. This hasty conclusion as to my sex she was led afterwards to revise, I am informed ; but her new opinion (which seems to have been something nearer the truth) was announced in a third language quite unknown to me, and probably Russian. To complete the scroll of her accomplishments, she was brought round the table after the meal was over, and said good-bye to me in very commendable English.

The weather I shall say nothing about, as I am incapable of explaining my sentiments upon that subject before a lady. But my health is really greatly improved : I begin to recognise myself occasionally now and again, not without satisfaction.

Please remember me very kindly to Professor Swan ; I wish I had a story to send him ; but story, Lord bless you, I have none to tell, sir, unless it is the foregoing adventure with the little polyglot. The best of that depends on the significance of *polisson*, which is beautifully out of place.

*Saturday*, 10*th January*.—The little Russian kid is only two and a half : she speaks six languages. She and her sister (aet. 8) and May Johnstone (aet. 8) are the delight of my life. Last night I saw them all dancing—O it was jolly ; kids are what is the matter with me. After the dancing, we all—that is the two Russian ladies, Robinet the French painter, Mr. and Mrs. Johnstone, two gover-

nesses, and fitful kids joining us at intervals—played a game of the stool of repentance in the Gallic idiom.

O—I have not told you that Colvin is gone ; however, he is coming back again ; he has left clothes in pawn to me.—Ever your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

[*Hotel Mirabeau, Mentone*]
*Sunday, 11th January,* 1874

IN many ways this hotel is more amusing than the Pavillon. There are the children, to begin with ; and then there are games every evening—the stool of repentance, question and answer, etc. ; and then we speak French, although that is not exactly an advantage in so far as personal brilliancy is concerned.

I am in lovely health again to-day : I walked as far as the Pont St. Louis very nearly, besides walking and knocking about among the olives in the afternoon. I do not make much progress with my French ; but I do make a little, I think. I was pleased with my success this evening, though I do not know if others shared the satisfaction.

The two Russian ladies are from Georgia all the way. They do not at all answer to the description of Georgian slaves however, being graceful and refined, and only good-looking after you know them a bit.

Please remember me very kindly to the Jenkins, and thank them for having asked about me. Tell Mrs. J. that I am engaged perfecting myself in the " Gallic idiom," in order to be a worthier Vatel for the future. Monsieur Folleté, our host, is a Vatel by the way. He cooks himself, and is not insensible to flattery on the score of his table. I began, of course, to complain of the wine (part of the routine of life at Mentone) ; I told him that where one found a kitchen so exquisite, one astonished oneself that the wine was not up to the same form. " Et voilà précisément mon côté faible, monsieur," he replied, with an indescribable ampli-

tude of gesture. "Que voulez-vous? Moi, je suis cuisinier!" It was as though Shakespeare, called to account for some such peccadillo as the Bohemian seaport, should answer magnificently that he was a poet. So Folleté lives in a golden zone of a certain sort—a golden, or rather torrid zone, whence he issues twice daily purple as to his face—and all these clouds and vapours and ephemeral winds pass far below him and disturb him not.

He has another hobby however—his garden, round which it is his highest pleasure to lead the unwilling guest. Whenever he is not in the kitchen, he is hanging round loose, seeking whom he may show his garden to. Much of my time is passed in studiously avoiding him, and I have brought the art to a very extreme pitch of perfection. The fox, often hunted, becomes wary.—Ever your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Mentone*], *Tuesday, 13th January,* 1874

. . . I LOST a Philipine to little Mary Johnstone last night; so to-day I sent her a rubbishing doll's toilet, and a little note with it, with some verses telling how happy children made every one near them happy also, and advising her to keep the lines, and some day, when she was "grown a stately demoiselle," it would make her "glad to know she gave pleasure long ago," all in a very lame fashion, with just a note of prose at the end, telling her to mind her doll and the dog, and not trouble her little head just now to understand the bad verses; for some time when she was ill, as I am now, they would be plain to her and make her happy. She has just been here to thank me, and has left me very happy. Children are certainly too good to be true.

Yesterday I walked too far, and spent all the afternoon on the outside of my bed; and went finally to rest at nine, and slept nearly twelve hours on the stretch. Bennet (the

doctor), when told of it this morning, augured well for my recovery; he said youth must be putting in strong; of course I ought not to have slept at all. As it was, I dreamed *horridly;* but not my usual dreams of social miseries and misunderstandings and all sorts of crucifixions of the spirit; but of good, cheery, physical things—of long successions of vaulted, dimly lit cellars full of black water, in which I went swimming among toads and unutterable, cold, blind fishes. Now and then these cellars opened up into sort of domed music-hall places, where one could land for a little on the slope of the orchestra, but a sort of horror prevented one from staying long, and made one plunge back again into the dead waters. Then my dream changed, and I was a sort of Siamese pirate, on a very high deck with several others. The ship was almost captured, and we were fighting desperately. The hideous engines we used and the perfectly incredible carnage that we effected by means of them kept me cheery, as you may imagine; especially as I felt all the time my sympathy with the boarders, and knew that I was only a prisoner with these horrid Malays. Then I saw a signal being given, and knew they were going to blow up the ship. I leaped right off, and heard my captors splash in the water after me as thick as pebbles when a bit of river bank has given way beneath the foot. I never heard the ship blow up; but I spent the rest of the night swimming about some piles with the whole sea full of Malays, searching for me with knives in their mouths. They could swim any distance under water, and every now and again, just as I was beginning to reckon myself safe, a cold hand would be laid on my ankle—ugh!

However, my long sleep, troubled as it was, put me all right again, and I was able to work acceptably this morning and be very jolly all day. This evening I have had a great deal of talk with both the Russian ladies; they talked very nicely, and are bright, likable women both. They come from Georgia.

*Wednesday*, 10.30.—We have all been to tea to-night at the Russians' villa. Tea was made out of a samovar, which is something like a small steam engine, and whose principal

advantage is that it burns the fingers of all who lay their profane touch upon it. After tea Madame Z. played Russian airs, very plaintive and pretty ; so the evening was Muscovite from beginning to end. Madame G.'s daughter danced a tarantella, which was very pretty.

Whenever Nelitchka cries—and she never cries except from pain—all that one has to do is to start " Malbrook s'en va-t-en guerre." She cannot resist the attraction ; she is drawn through her sobs into the air ; and in a moment there is Nellie singing, with the glad look that comes into her face always when she sings, and all the tears and pain forgotten.

It is wonderful, before I shut this up, how that child remains ever interesting to me. Nothing can stale her infinite variety ; and yet it is not very various. You see her thinking what she is to do or to say next, with a funny grave air of reserve, and then the face breaks up into a smile, and it is probably " Berecchino ! " * said with that sudden little jump of the voice that one knows in children, as the escape of a jack-in-the-box, and, somehow, I am quite happy after that !

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Mentone, January*, 1874], *Friday*

I HAVE been altogether upset this evening and my quiet work knocked on the head. I told you I did not understand the Russians ; but I didn't tell you altogether why ; indeed, I don't know if I quite *can* tell you yet. But the reason is this : I don't know what Mme. G.'s little game is with regard to me. Certainly she has either made up her mind to make a fool of me in a somewhat coarse manner, or else she is in train to make a fool of herself. I don't care which it is (though I sincerely hope it is the former) if it would

* This is Stevenson's regular way, with which I shall not interfere, of spelling *birichino*, the Italian equivalent of *polisson*, little rogue or rascal. He had picked the word up by ear and not from seeing it printed.

only take a definite shape ; but in the meantime, I am damnably embarrassed and yet funnily interested. It is very funny. They must want to make a fool of me ; and yet they must suppose me to be *such* a fool. It is too coarse for a joke. I wish you were here to tell me which it is. I have not thought it necessary to say anything about my own opinions in the matter, and I won't.

It is very odd what a fool they must think me. I can*not* get over it. Now, to-night, Mme. Z. asked to examine my hand. It was evidently a put-up thing, because I had asked her before and she did not do it. Well, she had hardly looked at it before she gave a little start and a cry (she is a finished actress), then followed some hasty, rather excited talk between her and her sister in Russian, and then Mme. Z. said : " Il y a quelque chose ici que ma soeur me défend de vous dire," and then after a pause, " Et cependant je crois bien que vous comprenez." A chair next Mme. G. became vacant, she motioned me to take it and talked to me for a long time quite sincerely and nicely about anything you like. I took the first occasion of leaving the chair and going away ; when up gets Mme. with a sort of fling and changes her seat also, saying something to her sister quite angrily in Russian.

You must understand that since my illness I have been unspeakably timid, bashful and blushful—I don't know why —and I suppose that that is where the humour of the thing lies.

There is a first report. We shall see how this goes on. I feel easier now I have told you how the thing stood ; I did not care to tell you of the very vague and possibly foolish notions that I have had before, but to-night has cleared the matter up so far ; and it now must be one of two things—a deliberate plant or an affair, which may bother me. It makes it all the more difficult for me to know how to act, that I really do like Mme. G., and am sorry for her ; feelings that will not be lessened at all by this plant ; if only she would be done with it. You know my impersonal way of liking people and how I would no more change my admiration for a person because I suffered from her than

I would for the grace of an aloe because I pricked my finger with it or for the ocean because it drowned for me my dearest friend. Mme. G. is a very fine organisation whom it gives me pleasure to study, a pleasure which will be neither increased nor diminished by this business, however it turns out.

*Saturday*.—A rainy day has kept the Russians at home, so I know no more than last night. Although I think more and more that Madame's intention was to get up a sorry little flirtation with as much seriousness as these things admit of, I am still pleased by thinking that the crass, almost brutal, stupidity that I exhibited last night may put an end to it.

I wish I could hear how you were. I can't make out what has come to my hand; I can't write legibly in the new position, and in the old I can't write at all. I am very well but utterly stupid; more utterly stupid than ever. Stupidity can't go further now, *Dieu merci!* My head is sewed up altogether. No unpleasant feelings, no fluidity, no creeping; only perfect stupidity.

9 *o'clock*.—Yes, I have succeeded, I think, in getting this thing straightened up. Mme. G. has been, as ever, very nice and *interested* with me this evening, and there has been no more bosh. This gives me great pleasure. Mme. Z., in giving characters all round (for a forfeit) said of me: "Monsieur est un jeune homme que je ne comprends pas. Il n'est pas méchant, je sais cela, mais après, ténèbres, ténèbres, ténèbres, rien que des ténèbres." That I understand for the best also; I believe it means that they are quite befogged with me and give me up. I am sincerely glad things have turned out thus; for I am very happy here among these people, and I was afraid there was going to be a difficulty. I don't think there will be now.

I am very well, feel very much as I did before the breakdown, that is to say, quite alive again, but useless, shaky, and nervous. I think S. C. would find a change in me, but I thought I should have recovered into good health, and not into my old shaky health as I seem to be doing.

*Sunday*.—Yes, I adhere to both my good statements of

yesterday ; I am better ; and the Russian difficulty—the Eastern question, so to speak—is solved. Both of the ladies are very kind and jolly to me to-day, and this is the second without any foolishness up to now. They are both of them the frankest of mortals, and have complained to me, in one way or other, that I am to them as some undiscovered animal. They do not seem to cultivate R. L. S.'s in Muscovy. It has been rather a curious episode.

Robinet and I went this evening to tea with them ; Mme. Johnstone was ill ; so neither she nor her husband could go. Well, my news is pleasant ; the conversation was interesting as usual—Mme. Z. is certainly a very clever women. But to-night it turned out that they know Mill and Spencer ; that Mill's death was regarded as a calamity in Russia ; that they are people of like views with us. At present, their word is to support the Empire, the people being unfit for power and the Empire lending itself to all advances ; but their opinions are most hopeful. It does one's heart good and gives one great hope for Russia. I wish you could know these two women ; you would like them. As for me, I think I am at my ease now ; they have changed their manner to me greatly and I do think there is an end of the nonsense. I know that Mme. Z. has now an exaggerated notion of my talents and character, and that will help. I have ceased to play the stupid, and take things as they come, and it seems to pay.

*Monday*.—Yes, I am much better, very much better I think I may say. Although it is funny how I have ceased to be able to write with the improvement of my health. I shouldn't wonder if I returned into a schoolboy phase. Do you notice how for some time back you have had no descriptions of anything ; the reason is that I can't describe anything. No words come to me when I see a thing just now. I want awfully to tell you, to-day, about a little " piece " of green sea, and gulls, and clouded sky with the usual golden mountain-breaks to the southward.[1] It was wonderful, the sea near at hand was living emerald ; the white breasts and wings of the gulls as they circled above—high above even—were dyed bright green by the

reflection. And if you could only have seen, or if any right word would only come to my pen to tell you, how wonderfully these illuminated birds floated hither and thither under the grey-purple of the sky !

Mademoiselle Pella made another attempt at killing her mother (her aunt), but her aunt (her mother) was there and she does seem to have a sort of sway over the child which the other has not ; and yet how the child hates her !

I am the worst writer in the world. You can't tell how I hate that ; it is a continual series of shameful surprises for me, now, to write, even a letter to you ; I don't manage to say what I mean.

I think I may send off this letter to-day. I have certainly come to a stage ; I think to the last stage. However, I am quite tranquil and cheery and well. I shall expect with interest a wise letter from you.

Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

The Miss Ward mentioned in the third paragraph of this letter is a sister, still living, of Mr. Humphry Ward : the other allusions in the same paragraph I cannot explain.

*Mentone, Wednesday, Jan. 14th/74*

THE name of the Russian who put me in mind of Jessie—or rather, I should say, the Russian mother's name,—is the Princess Zassetsky. I do not know what Madame Garschine's title is ; so cannot give you any more Burke. They are both very nice, I think : indeed the population of the hotel is all jolly : I like it infinitely better than the Pavillon lot of horrid English. This is such a jolly mixture from the mildest milk-and-water English clergyman's washed-out daughters to the somewhat roystering Yankeedom of Johnstone or the jolly free graceful manners of the Mesdames Russes.

I overwalked myself a hair's breadth on Monday, from which I am just recovering. I pay for such excesses in

utter uselessness during the day, an enormous proportion of sleep and that sleep troubled with horrible dreams; so I have a considerable interest in not overwalking myself.

Miss Ward goes on Saturday to San Remo for a fortnight—O yes madame, you desire all credit for your wisdom in the Romanes affair. I suppose it was Mrs. Logan who did it: Mrs. R. herself had evidently got muddled as to the story; I understood her to say you had written. I have seen and heard no more of them since my visit, and hope it may long be so.

Exercise a certain measure of discretion yourselves about sending books; of course don't let us go to the bankruptcy court. I shall proclaim my desires as they seem to me, but you may temper them with the worldly prudence peculiar to the Scottish Climate.

Mrs. Sitwell, I am glad to hear, is better again.

I have received Nos. 4 and 5 duly. This is going to be a dull letter in spite of all I can do. O! I lost a Philipine to little May Johnstone and gave her a doll's toilet.

I am going to lunch with Dowson on Friday.

I have never seen *Roads* myself yet and only part of it even in type at all; for I added a lot in proof. I am glad the Bishop of Toledo is dropped. I felt uneasy in his presence. Partly from not knowing quite what he meant.

Ever your afft. son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

O! a joke. I was informed by the nurse incidentally that I gave great satisfaction to Mme. la Princesse by treating her without façons upon some occasions. No wonder. I only knew she was a Russian with an unpronounceable name. I didn't know she was a Princess then.

R. L. S.

## To MRS. SITWELL

[*Mentone, January*, 1874], *Wednesday*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is still so cold, I cannot tell you how miserable the weather is. I have begun my *Walt Whitman* again seriously. Many winds have blown since

I last laid it down, when sickness took me in Edinburgh. It seems almost like an ill-considered jest to take up these old sentences, written by so different a person under circumstances so different, and try to string them together and organise them into something anyway whole and comely; it is like continuing another man's book. Almost every word is a little out of tune to me now but I shall pull it through for all that and make something that will interest you yet on this subject that I had proposed to myself and partly planned already, before I left for Cockfield last July.

I am very anxious to hear how you are. My own health is quite very good; I am a healthy octogenarian; very old, I thank you and of course not so active as a young man, but hale withal; a lusty December. This is so; such is R. L. S.

I am a little bothered about Bob, a little afraid that he is living too poorly. The fellow he chums with spends only two francs a day on food, with a little excess every day or two to keep body and soul together, and though Bob is not so austere I am afraid he draws it rather too fine himself.

*Friday*.—We have all got our photographs; it is pretty fair, they say, of me and as they are particular in the matter of photographs, and besides partial judges I suppose I may take that for proven. Of Nellie there is one quite adorable. The weather is still cold. My *Walt Whitman* at last looks really well: I think it is going to get into shape in spite of the long gestation.

*Sunday*.—Still cold and grey, and a high imperious wind off the sea. I see nothing particularly *couleur de rose* this morning: but I am trying to be faithful to my creed and hope. O yes, one can do something to make things happier and better; and to give a good example before men and show them how goodness and fortitude and faith remain undiminished after they have been stripped bare of all that is formal and outside. We must do that; you have done it already; and I shall follow and shall make a worthy life, and you must live to approve of me.

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Mentone, January*, 1874], *Tuesday*

Yesterday I could not write somehow. Your letter has just arrived—hurray! that sounds better—and the bird of paradise. I have more to tell you, of course, about the Russians. I am just a little afraid I am behaving badly. They amuse and interest me immensely. They are the only nice people really in Mentone; and so I have now given way altogether and spend all my time with them. I do think it is all right, however. I am quite as much with the one as with the other. I will tell you about yesterday; and you can judge for yourself. At lunch Mme. G. sat next me; in the afternoon they were sitting on the beach, and as Mme. Z. was writing, I camped on Mme. G.'s shawl and talked for, I daresay, about an hour. At dinner Mme. Z. came and sat next me, and, after dinner, as Nellie had been sick and was at home, she had to go back and asked me to come with her. Until Nellie went to bed, we amused her, and then we sat and smoked cigarettes together, and talked marriage and society and all sorts of things until Mme. G. came in from the Hotel about nine. I offered to go, as in duty bound, but was made to stay and stopped with the pair of them until half-past ten. They really are two of the splendidest people in the world. I will tell you something about both of them that will interest you. 1st. The Princess: What breaks her heart is Germany. "I wish," she says, "to found Society upon love, and here I find the happiest possible families, consisting of a learned professor and a kitchenmaid. Even Goethe was happiest with his kitchenmaid. If I could, I *wouldn't believe* in Germany." 2nd. Mme. G. All I know about her is from Mme. Z. She is reserved about herself. However, she is so bigoted in the views that we hold, so convinced that all paltering with error only does harm that she has never been to church since she has married. Consequently, the peasants believe she is a devil. They know, however, that she takes better care of them than anyone else, and this is not an uncommon scene. A woman, in

childbirth, sends for her, and beseeches her to make the sign of the Cross (" because we know that you have Satan in you ") before she touches her. Madame is inflexible. " I have nothing to do with either God or Satan," she says always. " You know *me*, and you know whether I come to you with a good intention or no. If you think I don't, you should not let me come, and I will go away again." Isn't that a strange person ? and a fine person ? I *do* wish you could know these two women ; you would like them and they would interest you, just as I like them and am interested in them. Mme. Z. has had ten kids ; this, she says, explains her ignorance ; her ignorance does not need much explanation as there is not much of it. Mme. Z. did not come to lunch. Mme. G. was there and we had a talk which enlightened me a good deal as to her character. We somehow got on to Christ. " J'en suis amoureux," she said, " I have never loved any man I have seen. I want to have been one of those women who did love him and followed him." This Christ business explains the bigotry.

I have bought a new hat, a brigand sort of arrangement. I don't think it partakes much of the perpetual loveliness of old marbles. There is a delicate bloom upon it that the first shower, I know, will remove. It is probably glue, and if so, God knows what may be the result on the coherency of the whole structure.

In health, on this beautiful day, I am perfect. I have been sitting alone by the sea, with a sunshade between me and the sun, and feeling just as happy as I could be and telling myself all manner of nice things. Corsica was just visible on the horizon and, what was far more lovely, ranges of delicate cloud-mountains, white and faint and far-away, in the intense pale blue ; for the blue has a way of being at once intense and pale ; even of ceasing to be blue altogether, and changing into a nameless whiteness, like that at the heart of a violet (I think, or a pansy ?) that somehow, is to me a perfume. The gulls, as usual, sailed by continually, tilted, and on the watch for fish.

10.30.—O yes. It's all right. These people like me now, and it's all right, I feel sure. I have spent this evening

also with them—Robinet and I—and they *are* nice. I am awfully lucky to have found them. Mme. Z. says she will let Nelitchka go on the stage if she has the vocation, as seems likely. N. is a darling and no mistake.

*Wednesday*, 4 *o'clock*.—Nothing to-day to tell you, except that the weather is lovely and I am well and stupid. I have quite got over my fears about what you know and take the goods that the Gods supply me withal, contentedly and unenquiringly. Nelitchka is still seedy, and I have not seen her once to-day, which is a privation.

*Thursday*.—I hope my last letter did not bother you ; I was bothered myself a little when I wrote it. I am not bothered now. Mme. G. is very nice to me, sweet and serious. Mme. Z. has a great idea that I am very clever, I think ; indeed, they both have. You know it is with me, as with you ; people will take me for being cleverer than I feel. Only I understand it in my case. I do say and think nice and true things ; people observe that ; and they cannot tell the want of *suite* and fibre, the defect of strong continuousness, that there is behind it all.

I wonder if I was wrong to write to you as I did last ? I don't think so. I do want always to write what is up in my mind ; besides it was a matter about which I wished counsel. And God knows, I don't understand it yet. The extreme niceness that is shown now, far more than before, is still inexplicable to me. I am disoriented—all abroad. However, not unpleasantly now.

I have been all the afternoon in the garden playing with Nellie and talking to Mme. Z. She has written three comedies (almost farces as far as I could judge from her description) which have been very successful. Mme. G. did not appear at all upon the scene. It was she who asked me in and she left the moment I accepted the invitation. Nellie made my life a burden to me, playing hide and seek and making me eat bread whether I would or not ; we are now excellent friends. Mme. Z. demanded " à quand les noces ? " But I have a serious rival in M. Robinet, whom she calls " Nenet," and whom, as he walks with her arm in arm with his legs doubled, she regards as a little boy.

*Friday.*—My dear friend, I cannot write this morning, and I wanted to write. You must just take my adieux without any embellishment.

Ever your faithful friend,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Mentone, February,* 1874], *Friday*

YESTERDAY afternoon for the first time for a day or two I had a good long talk with Mme. G. I wish I could make up my mind to tell you what she said, for I should like to know if you would agree with it: I have been quite confused and upset every time I have thought of it since. If I am like what she says, I must be a very nice person! There is not a cloud in the sky, as you may see by this. Poor woman, she seems to be suffering more than ever. I hear that her husband is ill; and, as (I have been told) she never means to go back to him, I daresay this may account for something in her changed looks.

S. C. heard yesterday, and I was pleased to hear about G. Eliot. Look here, do you know that I am getting really better? I shall be better soon, and able to work and be about all that you want me, and be to you what you know I wish to be.

*Saturday.*—I have lost my penholder; so this must go in pencil. I had a bad day yesterday, one of those days, you know, when life seems one *impasse*, one impossibility. Everything looked wrong to me, and I was sick at heart. The weather was grey and blustering, as it might have been in Edinburgh, and I went labouring up and down the beach in the wind, and in a passion with myself—at least a sort of sham passion, a little froth on the top of a great dead-sea of discouragement. I am out of it again a good deal; but you know, there the thing does remain a little. These things do not pass in a night's time: I shall have a bad time again likely enough, this afternoon. You don't know that about me; when I am discouraged, I am discouraged;

I feared I should not be strong enough to take a position when I went home, and would let myself be drawn into a false one ; and everything else in the same way looked black and impossible, and blockaded by impenetrable walls.

I may tell you also, while I am in the Jeremy mood, that I am discontented with myself. All that Mme. G. told me the other day (and I believe she meant it)—all that you have told me, *all that you feel for me*—is so much better than I feel myself to be that I begin to loathe myself as an imposture. When you see *Ordered South* you will understand how I prefer " the shadowy life that we have in the hearts of others," because it is so much more beautiful and noble, to the vulgar little market-place of petty passions that I know bitterly to be myself. Is it all a dream, dear ? Lift up your eyes, and you will see that I am not worthy, and turn away.

I am so glad now to be sure, and thoroughly to understand that past difficulty. It was all, as I see now distinctly, something got up between jest and earnest—three parts at least in jest—by Mme. Z. : the other never had a hand or an interest in it.

*Sunday*.—I wonder how you are, and I don't know whether to send this off or wait until I hear from you. I am a little tired and stupid still, this morning, and have nothing to say, except that I do not fail to think of you ; nor shall ever. Also I begin to be somewhat homesick and impatient—not for Edinburgh, as you may fancy ; and on the whole I am somewhat low at heart. This is all because it is February—don't think much of it. If I could only knock, this forenoon, at the door of No. 15 !

Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The following are two different impressions of the Mediterranean, dated on two different Mondays in January :—

YES, I am much better ; very much better I think I may say. Although it is funny how I have ceased to be able to

write with the improvement of my health. Do you notice how for some time back you have had no descriptions of anything? The reason is that I can't describe anything. No words come to me when I see a thing. I want awfully to tell you to-day about a little *piece* of green sea, and gulls, and clouded sky with the usual golden mountain-breaks to the southward. It was wonderful, the sea near at hand was living emerald; the white breasts and wings of the gulls as they circled above—high above even—were dyed bright green by the reflection. And if you could only have seen or if any right word would only come to my pen to tell you how wonderfully these illuminated birds floated hither and thither under the grey purples of the sky!

## To Sidney Colvin

[*Mentone, January*, 1874]

My dear Colvin,—I write to let you know that my cousin may possibly come to Paris before you leave; he will likely look you up to hear about me, etc. I want to tell you about him before you see him, as I am tired of people misjudging him. You know *me* now. Well, Bob is just such another mutton, only somewhat farther wandered. He has all the same elements of character that I have: no two people were ever more alike, only that the world has gone more unfortunately for him although more evenly. Besides which, he is really a gentleman, and an admirable true friend, which is not a common article. I write this as a letter of introduction in case he should catch you ere you leave.

*Monday*.—No letters to-day. *Sacré chien, Dieu de Dieu*—and I have written with exemplary industry. But I am hoping that no news is good news and shall continue so to hope until all is blue.—Ever yours,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

## To Sidney Colvin

It had been a very cold Christmas at Monaco and Monte Carlo, and Stevenson had no adequate overcoat, so it was agreed that when I went to Paris I should try and find him a warm cloak or wrap. I amused myself looking for one suited to his taste for the picturesque and piratical in apparel, and found one in the style of 1830-40, dark blue and flowing, and fastening with a snake buckle.

[*Mentone, January*, 1874], *Friday*

My dear Colvin,—Thank you very much for your note. This morning I am stupid again ; can do nothing at all ; am no good " comme plumitif." I think it must be the cold outside. At least that would explain my addled head and intense laziness.

O why did you tell me about that cloak ? Why didn't you buy it ? Isn't it in *Julius Cæsar* that Pompey blames—no not Pompey but a friend of Pompey's—well, Pompey's friend, I mean the friend of Pompey—blames somebody else who was his friend—that is who was the friend of Pompey's friend—because he (the friend of Pompey's friend) had not done something right off, but had come and asked him (Pompey's friend) whether he (the friend of Pompey's friend) ought to do it or no ? There I fold my hands with some complacency : that's a piece of very good narration. I am getting into good form. These classical instances are always distracting. I was talking of the cloak. It's awfully dear. Are there no cheap and nasty imitations ? Think of that—if, however, it were the opinion (ahem) of competent persons that the great cost of the mantle in question was no more than proportionate to its durability ; if it were to be a joy for ever ; if it would cover my declining years and survive me in anything like integrity for the comfort of my executors ; if—I have the word—if the price indicates (as it seems) the quality of *perdurability* in the fabric ; if, in fact, it would not be extravagant, but only the leariest economy to lay out £5, 15s. in a single mantle without seam and without price, and if—

and if—it really fastens with an agrafe—I would BUY it. But not unless. If not, a cheap imitation would be the move.—Ever yours,

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

The following is in answer to a set of numbered questions, of which the first three are of no general interest.

[*Mentone*], *Monday, January 19th*, 1874

Answers to a series of questions.

. . . . . .

4. Nelitchka, or Nelitska, as you know already by this time, is my adorable kid's name. Her laugh does more good to one's health than a month at the seaside : as she said to-day herself, when asked whether she was a boy or a girl, after having denied both with gravity, she is an angel.

5. O no, her brain is not in a chaos ; it is only the brains of those who hear her. It is all plain sailing for her. She wishes to refuse or deny anything, and there is the English " No fank you " ready to her hand ; she wishes to admire anything, and there is the German " schön " ; she wishes to sew (which she does with admirable seriousness and clumsiness), and there is the French " coudre " ; she wishes to say she is ill, and there is the Russian " bulla " ; she wishes to be down on any one, and there is the Italian " Berecchino " ; she wishes to play at a railway train, and there is her own original word " Collie " (say the o with a sort of Gaelic twirl). And all these words are equally good.

. . . . . .

7. I am called M. Stevenson by everybody except Nelitchka, who calls me M. Berecchino.

8. The weather to-day is no end : as bright and as warm as ever. I have been out on the beach all afternoon with the Russians. Madame Garschine has been reading Russian to me ; and I cannot tell prose from verse in that delectable tongue, which is a pity. Johnstone came out to tell us that

Corsica was visible, and there it was over a white, sweltering sea, just a little darker than the pallid blue of the sky, and when one looked at it closely, breaking up into sun-brightened peaks.

I may mention that Robinet has never heard an Englishman with so little accent as I have—ahem—ahem—eh ?—What do you say to that ? I don't suppose I have said five sentences in English to-day ; all French ; all bad French, alas !

I am thought to be looking better. Madame Zassetsky said I was all green when I came here first, but that I am all right in colour now, and she thinks fatter. I am very partial to the Russians ; I believe they are rather partial to me. I am supposed to be an *esprit observateur ! À mon âge, c'est étonnant comme je suis observateur !*

The second volume of *Clément Marot* has come. Where and O where is the first ?—Ever your affectionate

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Sidney Colvin

*The Bottle* here mentioned is a story that had been some time in hand, called *The Curate of Anstruther's Bottle ;* afterwards abandoned like so many early attempts of the same kind.

[*Mentone, January,* 1874]

MY DEAR S. C.,—I suppose this will be my last note then. I think you will find everything very jolly here, I am very jolly myself. I worked six hours to-day. I am occupied in transcribing *The Bottle*, which is pleasant work to me ; I find much in it that I still think excellent and much that I am doubtful about ; my convention is so terribly difficult that I have to put out much that pleases me, and much that I still preserve I only preserve with misgiving. I wonder if my convention is not a little too hard and too much in the style of those decadent curiosities, poems without the letter E, poems going with the alphabet and the like. And yet the idea, if rightly understood and treated as a convention always and not as an abstract principle,

should not so much hamper one as it seems to do. The idea is not, of course, to put in nothing but what would naturally have been noted and remembered and handed down, but not to put in anything that would make a person stop and say—how could this be known? Without doubt it has the advantage of making one rely on the essential interest of a situation and not cocker up and validify feeble intrigue with incidental fine writing and scenery, and pyrotechnic exhibitions of inappropriate cleverness and sensibility. I remember Bob once saying to me that the quadrangle of Edinburgh University was a good thing and our having a talk as to how it could be employed in different arts. I then stated that the different doors and staircases ought to be brought before a reader of a story not by mere recapitulation but by the use of them, by the descent of different people one after another by each of them. And that the grand feature of shadow and the light of the one lamp in the corner should also be introduced only as they enabled people in the story to see one another or prevented them. And finally that whatever could not thus be worked into the evolution of the action had no right to be commemorated at all. After all, it is a story you are telling; not a place you are to describe; and everything that does not attach itself to the story is out of place.

This is a lecture not a letter, and it seems rather like sending coals to Newcastle to write a lecture to a subsidised professor. I hope you have seen Bob by this time. I know he is anxious to meet you and I am in great anxiety to know what you think of his prospects—frankly, of course: as for his person, I don't care a damn what you think of it: I am case-hardened in that matter.

I wrote a French note to Madame Zassetsky the other day, and there were no errors in it. The complete Gaul, as you may see.—Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Mentone, January 26th,* 1874]

. . . Last night I had a quarrel with the American on politics. It is odd how it irritates you to hear certain political statements made. He was excited, and he began suddenly to abuse our conduct to America. I, of course, admitted right and left that we had behaved disgracefully (as we had), until somehow I got tired of turning alternate cheeks and getting duly buffeted ; and when he said that the Alabama money had not wiped out the injury, I suggested, in language (I remember) of admirable directness and force, that it was a pity they had taken the money in that case. He lost his temper at once, and cried out that his dearest wish was a war with England ; whereupon I also lost my temper, and, thundering at the pitch of my voice, I left him and went away by myself to another part of the garden. A very tender reconciliation took place, and I think there will come no more harm out of it. We are both of us nervous people, and he had had a very long walk and a good deal of beer at dinner : that explains the scene a little. But I regret having employed so much of the voice with which I have been endowed, as I fear every person in the hotel was taken into confidence as to my sentiments, just at the very juncture when neither the sentiments nor (perhaps) the language had been sufficiently considered.

*Friday.*—You have not yet heard of my book ?—*Four Great Scotsmen*—John Knox, David Hume, Robert Burns, Walter Scott. These, their lives, their work, the social media in which they lived and worked, with, if I can so make it, the strong current of the race making itself felt underneath and throughout—this is my idea. You must tell me what you think of it. The Knox will really be new matter, as his life hitherto has been disgracefully written, and the events are romantic and rapid ; the character very strong, salient, and worthy ; much interest as to the future of Scotland, and as to that part of him which was truly modern under his Hebrew disguise. Hume, of course, the

urbane, cheerful, gentlemanly, letter-writing eighteenth century, full of attraction, and much that I don't yet know as to his work. Burns, the sentimental side that there is in most Scotsmen, his poor troubled existence, how far his poems were his personally, and how far national, the question of the framework of society in Scotland, and its fatal effects upon the finest natures. Scott again, the ever delightful man, sane, courageous, admirable; the birth of Romance, in a dawn that was a sunset; snobbery, conservatism, the wrong thread in History, and notably in that of his own land. *Voilà, madame, le menu. Comment le trouvez-vous? Il y a de la bonne viande, si on parvient à la cuire convenablement.*

R. L. S.

## To Thomas Stevenson

[*Mentone*], *Monday, January 26th*, 1874

My dear Father,—Heh! Heh! business letter finished. Receipt acknowledged without much ado, and I think with a certain commercial decision and brevity. The signature is good but not original.

I should rather think I *had* lost my heart to the wee princess. Her mother demanded the other day "*À quand les noces?*" which Mrs. Stevenson will translate for you in case you don't see it yourself.

I had a political quarrel last night with the American; it was a real quarrel for about two minutes; we relieved our feelings and separated; but a mutual feeling of shame led us to a most moving reconciliation, in which the American vowed he would shed his best blood for England. In looking back upon the interview, I feel that I have learned something; I scarcely appreciated how badly England had behaved, and how well she deserves the hatred the Americans bear her. It would have made you laugh if you could have been present and seen your unpatriotic son thundering anathemas in the moonlight against all those that were not the friends of England. Johnstone being nearly as nervous

as I, we were both very ill after it, which added a further pathos to the reconciliation.

There is no good in sending this off to-day, as I have sent another letter this morning already.

O, a remark of the Princess's amused me the other day. Somebody wanted to give Nelitchka garlic as a medicine. "*Quoi? Une petite amour comme ça, qu'on ne pourrait pas baiser? Il n'y a pas de sens en cela!*"

I am reading a lot of French histories just now, and the spelling keeps one in a good humour all day long—I mean the spelling of English names.—Your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

[*Mentone, January* 29, 1874], *Thursday*

*Marot* vol. 1 arrived. The post has been at its old games. A letter of the 31st and one of the 2nd arrive at the same moment.

I have had a great pleasure. Mrs. Andrews had a book of Scotch airs, which I brought over here, and set Madame Z. to work upon them. They are so like Russian airs that they cannot contain their astonishment. I was quite out of my mind with delight. "The Flowers of the Forest"—"Auld Lang Syne"—"Scots wha hae"—"Wandering Willie"—"Jock o' Hazeldean"—"My Boy Tammie," which my father whistles so often—I had no conception how much I loved them. The air which pleased Madame Zassetsky the most was "Hey, Johnnie Cope, are ye waukin yet?" It is certainly no end. And I was so proud that they were appreciated. No triumph of my own, I am sure, could ever give me such vainglorious satisfaction. You remember, perhaps, how conceited I was to find "Auld Lang Syne" popular in its German dress; but even that was nothing to the pleasure I had yesterday at the success of our dear airs.

The edition is called *The Songs of Scotland without Words*

*for the Pianoforte*, edited by J. T. Surenne, published by Wood in George Street. As these people have been so kind to me, I wish you would get a copy of this and send it out. If that should be too dear, or anything, Mr. Mowbray would be able to tell you what is the best substitute, would he not? *This* I really would like you to do, as Madame proposes to hire a copyist to copy those she likes, and so it is evident she wants them.—Ever your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO THOMAS STEVENSON

With reference to the political allusions in the following, it will be remembered that this was the date of the dissolution of Parliament by Mr. Gladstone, followed by his defeat at the polls notwithstanding his declared intention of abolishing the income tax. The acquaintance with Andrew Lang, of which the beginning is here mentioned, developed quickly into a warm friendship.

[*Mentone*], *February 1st*, 1874

I AM so sorry to hear of poor Mr. M.'s death. He was really so amiable and kind that no one could help liking him, and carrying away a pleasant recollection of his simple, happy ways. I hope you will communicate to all the family how much I feel with them.

Madame Zassetsky is Nelitchka's mamma. They have both husbands, and they are in Russia, and the ladies are both here for their health. They make it very pleasant for me here. To-day we all went a drive to the Cap Martin, and the Cap was adorable in the splendid sunshine.

I read J. H. A. Macdonald's speech with interest; his sentiments are quite good, I think. I would support him against M'Laren at once. What has disgusted me most as yet about this election is the detestable proposal to do away with the income tax. Is there no shame about the easy classes? Will those who have nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of the advantage of our society, never consent to pay a single tax unless it is to be paid also by those who have to bear the burthen and heat of the day,

with almost none of the reward ? And the selfishness here is detestable, because it is so deliberate. A man may not feel poverty very keenly and may live a quiet self-pleasing life in pure thoughtlessness ; but it is quite another matter when he knows thoroughly what the issues are, and yet wails pitiably because he is asked to pay a little more, even if it does fall hardly sometimes, than those who get almost none of the benefit. It is like the healthy child crying because they do not give him a goody, as they have given to his sick brother to take away the taste of the dose. I have not expressed myself clearly ; but for all that, you ought to understand, I think.

*Friday, February 6th.*—The wine has arrived, and a dozen of it has been transferred to me ; it is much better than Folleté's stuff. We had a masquerade last night at the Villa Marina ; Nellie in a little red satin cap, in a red satin suit of boy's clothes, with a funny little black tail that stuck out behind her, and wagged as she danced about the room, and gave her a look of Puss in Boots ; Pella as a contadina ; Monsieur Robinet as an old woman, and Mademoiselle as an old lady with blue spectacles.

Yesterday we had a visit from one of whom I had often heard from Mrs. Sellar—Andrew Lang. He is good-looking, delicate, Oxfordish, etc.

My cloak is the most admirable of all garments. For warmth, unequalled ; for a sort of pensive, Roman stateliness, sometimes warming into Romantic guitarism, it is simply without concurrent ; it starts alone. If you could see me in my cloak, it would impress you. I am hugely better, I think : I stood the cold these last few days without trouble, instead of taking to bed, as I did at Monte Carlo. I hope you are going to send the Scotch music.

I am stupid at letter-writing again ; I don't know why. I hope it may not be permanent ; in the meantime, you must take what you can get and be hopeful. The Russian ladies are as kind and nice as ever.—Ever your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Mentone, February* 6, 1874], *Friday*

Last night we had a masquerade at the Villa Marina. Pella was dressed as a contadina and looked beautiful ; and little Nellie, in red satin cap and wonderful red satin jacket and little breeches as of a nondescript impossible boy ; to which Madame Garschine had slily added a little black tail that wagged comically behind her as she danced about the room, and got deliciously tilted up over the middle bar of the back of her chair as she sat at tea, with an irresistible suggestion of Puss in Boots—well, Nellie thus masqueraded (to get back to my sentence again), was all that I could have imagined. She held herself so straight and stalwart, and had such an infinitesimal dignity of carriage ; and then her big baby face, already quite definitely marked with her sex, came in so funnily atop that she got clear away from all my power of similes and resembled nothing in the world but Nellie in masquerade. Then there was Robinet in a white nightgown, old woman's cap (*mutch*, in my vernacular), snuff-box and crutch, doubled up and yet leaping and gyrating about the floor with incredible agility ; and lastly, Mademoiselle in a sort of elderly walking-dress and with blue spectacles. And all this incongruous impossible world went tumbling and dancing and going hand in hand, in flying circles to the music ; until it was enough to make one forget one was in this wicked world, with Conservative majorities and Presidents MacMahon and all other abominations about one.

Also last night will be memorable to me for another reason, Madame Zassetsky having given me a light as to my own intellect. They were talking about things in history remaining in their minds because they had assisted them to generalisations. And I began to explain how things remained in my mind yet more vividly for no reason at all. She got interested and made me give her several examples ; then she said, with her little falsetto of discovery, " Mais c'est que vous êtes tout simplement enfant ! "

This *mot* I have reflected on at leisure and there is some truth in it. Long may I be so. Yesterday too I finished *Ordered South* and at last had some pleasure and contentment with it. S. C. has sent it off to Macmillan's this morning and I hope it may be accepted; I don't care whether it is or no except for the all-important lucre; the end of it is good, whether the able-editor sees it or no.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

[*Mentone*], *February 22nd*, 1874

MY DEAR MOTHER,—I am glad to hear you are better again: nobody can expect to be *quite* well in February, that is the only consolation I can offer you.

Madame Garschine is ill, I am sorry to say, and was confined to bed all yesterday, which made a great difference to our little society. À propos of which, what keeps me here is just precisely the said society. These people are so nice and kind and intelligent, and then as I shall never see them any more I have a disagreeable feeling about making the move. With ordinary people in England, you have more or less chance of re-encountering one another; at least you may see their death in the papers; but with these people, they die for me and I die for them when we separate.

Andrew Lang, O you of little comprehension, called on Colvin.

You had not told me before about the fatuous person who thought *Roads* like Ruskin—surely the vaguest of contemporaneous humanity. Again my letter-writing is of an enfeebled sort.—Ever your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

His correspondent had been visiting a sister in Paris and was now returning to London. The "paper" is one of his early

essays for *The Portfolio*. *Walt Whitman* is a study of that poet on which he was already engaged, but which he did not get executed to his satisfaction till five years later.

[*Mentone, February*, 1874], *Monday*

I JUST wish to say good-night to you. To-day has been windy, but not cold. The sea was troubled and had a fine fresh saline smell like our own seas, and the sight of the breaking waves and, above all, the spray that drove now and again in my face, carried me back to storms that I have enjoyed, O how much ! Still (as Mme. Z. remarked) there is something irritating in a stormy sea whose waves come always to the same spot and no further. It looks like playing at passion ; it reminds one of the loathsome sham waves in a stage ocean.

To-morrow, you go, and to-morrow night, the Straits will be again between us. Absence from you brings home distances to me wonderfully, and I have a sort of bird's-eye picture of the space that separates us always under my eye. I am afraid my letters will again cease to amuse you, for I have got used to my surroundings and begin to take the people a little more as a matter of course.

No, my paper is not good, it has the right stuff in it, but I have not got it said. I am afraid S. C. when it comes, will be disappointed. I did not tell you he had written me such a jolly note, saying he hoped a great deal from me. It is very nice of him, but I am not so good a card as he thinks ; it is very doubtful to me if I shall ever have wit enough to do more than good paragraphs. However, a good paragraph is a good paragraph, and may give tired people rest and pleasure, quite as well as a good book, although for not so long ; a flower in a pot is not a garden, but it is a flower for all that, and its perfume does the heart good. So let us take heart of grace and be happy.

*Tuesday*.—The weather is all right again, soft and sunny and like summer. For some days, I have been off work, owing to cold, etc., but to-morrow I hope to get to it again ; this unhappy *Walt Whitman*. I generally find myself no good, when it is in the question. O, your last letter was just what I wanted.

*Thursday*.—I am better again, having been indifferent out of it, these two last days. The work still lies over, my malison upon it all! I send you a picter of me, which I think looks like a hunchback, but they say it is like me when I am looking at people a little puzzled. Mme. G. says the under lip requires to be doctored up with a little Indian ink, or something, which she is going to do for her copy.

The Prince Galitzin has arrived. I do not quite know yet if I like him. I am still plodding away at John Knox and doing a pleasanter spell of work over the Waverley Novels.

I see what they mean about the picture; if you cover the lower part of the face, you will see a hard, funny, puzzled sort of smile around the eyes.

*Sunday*.*—Yesterday was such an admirable day, I had a long walk (for me) in the olive yards, the coolth was delicious; imagine that in March. It was curious how every person I met in the course of my walk spoke a different language: French, English, Russian, Mentonese—it might have been the plains of Heaven with the great multitude made perfect out of all tongues and nations spread abroad in happiness over them.

Yes, I think I rather like this Russian Prince; certainly not so well, however, as the ladies: I have begun to give Pella lessons in English, by the way. Just time to catch post.

Ever your faithful friend,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

[*Mentone*], *March 1st*, 1874

MY DEAR MOTHER,—The weather is again beautiful, soft, warm, cloudy, and soft again, in provincial sense. Very interesting, I find Robertson; and Dugald Stewart's life of him a source of unquenchable laughter. Dugald Stewart is not much better than McCrie, and puts me much in mind of him. By the way, I want my father to find out

* Apparently the first Sunday in March.

whether any more of Knox's Works was ever issued than the five volumes, as I have them. There are some letters that I am very anxious to see, not printed in any of the five, and perhaps still in MS.

I suppose you are now home again in Auld Reekie : that abode of bliss does not much attract me yet a bit.

Colvin leaves at the end of this week, I fancy.

How badly yours sincerely writes. O ! Madame Zassetsky has a theory that *Dumbarton Drums* is an epitome of my character and talents. She plays it, and goes into ecstasies over it, taking everybody to witness that each note, as she plays it, is the moral of Berecchino. Berecchino is my stereotype name in the world now. I am announced as M. Berecchino ; a German hand-maiden came to the hotel, the other night, asking for M. Berecchino ; said hand-maiden supposing in good faith that sich was my name.

Your letter come. O, I am all right now about the parting, because it will not be death, as we are to write. Of course the correspondence will drop off : but that's no odds, it breaks the back of the trouble.—Ever your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

[*Mentone*], *Monday, March 9th,* 1874

WE have all been getting photographed and the proofs are to be seen to-day. How they will look I know not. Madame Zassetsky arranged me for mine, and then said to the photographer : " *C'est mon fils. Il vient d'avoir dix-neuf ans. Il est tout fier de sa moustache. Tâchez de la faire paraître,*" and then bolted, leaving me solemnly alone with the artist. The artist was quite serious, and explained that he would try to " *faire ressortir ce que veut Madame la Princesse* " to the best of his ability ; he bowed very much to me, after this, in quality of Prince you see. I bowed in return and handled the flap of my cloak after the most

princely fashion I could command.—Ever your affectionate son,

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

[*Mentone*], *March* 20, 1874

I. *My Cloak.*—An exception occurs to me to the frugality described a letter (or may be two) ago; my cloak; it would certainly have been possible to have got something less expensive; still it is a fine thought for absent parents that their son possesses simply THE GREATEST vestment in Mentone. It is great in size, and unspeakably great in design; *qua* raiment, it has not its equal.

. . . . . .

III. *About Spain.*—Well, I don't know about *me* and Spain. I am certainly in no humour and in no state of health for voyages and travels. Towards the end of May (see end), up to which time I seem to see my plans, I might be up to it, or I might not; I think *not* myself. I have given up all idea of going on to Italy, though it seems a pity when one is so near; and Spain seems to me in the same category. But for all that, it need not interfere with your voyage thither: I would not lose the chance, if I wanted.

IV. *Money.*—I am much obliged. That makes £180 now. This money irks me, one feels it more than when living at home. However, if I have health, I am in a fair way to make a bit of a livelihood for myself. Now please don't take this up wrong; don't suppose I am thinking of the transaction between you and me; I think of the transaction between me and mankind. I think of all this money wasted in keeping up a structure that may never be worth it—all this good money sent after bad. I shall be seriously angry if you take me up wrong.

V. *Roads.*—The familiar false concord is not certainly a form of colloquialism that I should feel inclined to encourage. It is very odd; I wrote it very carefully, and

you seem to have read it very carefully, and yet none of us found it out. The Deuce is in it.

VI. *Russian Prince.*—A cousin of these ladies is come to stay with them—Prince Léon Galitzin. He is the image of—whom ?—guess now—do you give it up ?—Hillhouse.

VII. *Miscellaneous.*—I send you a pikter of me in the cloak. I think it is like a hunchback. The moustache is clearly visible to the naked eye—O diable ! what do I hear in my lug ? A mosquito—the first of the season. Bad luck to him !

Goodnicht and joy be wi' you a'. I am going to bed.—Ever your affectionate son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

*Note to III.*—I had counted on being back at Embro' by the last week or so of May.

## To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

This tells more fully of the new member of the Russian party, Prince Galitzin, recently arrived at Mentone, who did his best, very nearly with success, to persuade Stevenson to join him in the study of law for some terms under the celebrated Professor Jhering at Göttingen.

[*Mentone, March* 28, 1874]

MY DEAR MOTHER,—Beautiful weather, perfect weather ; sun, pleasant cooling winds ; health very good ; only incapacity to write.

The only new cloud on my horizon (I mean this in no menacing sense) is the Prince. I have philosophical and artistic discussions with the Prince. He is capable of talking for two hours upon end, developing his theory of everything under Heaven from his first position, which is that there is no straight line. Doesn't that sound like a game of my father's—I beg your pardon, you haven't read it—I don't mean *my* father, I mean Tristram Shandy's. He is very clever, and it is an immense joke to hear him unrolling all the problems of life—philosophy, science, what you will—in this charmingly cut-and-dry, here-we-are-again kind of manner. He is better to listen to than to argue

withal. When you differ from him, he lifts up his voice and thunders ; and you know that the thunder of an excited foreigner often miscarries. One stands aghast, marvelling how such a colossus of a man, in such a great commotion of spirit, can open his mouth so much and emit such a still small voice at the hinder end of it all. All this while he walks about the room, smokes cigarettes, occupies divers chairs for divers brief spaces, and casts his huge arms to the four winds like the sails of a mill. He is a most sportive Prince.

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Mentone, April,* 1874], *Monday*

My last night at Mentone. I cannot tell how strange and sad I feel. I leave behind me a dear friend whom I have but little hope of seeing again between the eyes.

To-day, I hadn't arranged all my plans till five o'clock : I hired a poor old cabman, whose uncomfortable vehicle and sorry horse made every one despise him, and set off to get money and say farewells. It was a dark misty evening ; the mist was down over all the hills ; the peach-trees in beautiful pink bloom. Arranged my plans ; that merits a word by the way if I can be bothered. I have half arranged to go to Göttingen in summer to a course of lectures. Galitzin is responsible for this. He tells me the professor is to Law what Darwin has been to Natural History, and I should like to understand Roman Law and a knowledge of law is so necessary for all I hope to do.

My poor old cabman ; his one horse made me three-quarters of an hour too late for dinner, but I had not the heart to discharge him and take another. Poor soul, he was so pleased with his pourboire, I have made Madame Zassetsky promise to employ him often ; so he will be something the better for me, little as he will know it.

I have read *Ordered South ;* it is pretty decent I think, but poor, stiff, limping stuff at best—not half so well straightened up as *Roads*. However the stuff is good.

God help us all, this is a rough world : address Hotel

St. Romain, rue St. Roch, Paris. I draw the line: a chapter finished :—ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

The line.

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That bit of childishness has made me laugh, do you blame me?

The two next letters are written from Paris, whither he had gone as planned. The first, addressed to his mother, shows him still uncertain as to his next movements. A sharp attack of illness followed, and is recorded in a long letter to Mrs. Sitwell, informing her of his decision to travel by slow stages home to Edinburgh.

### TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

*Paris, April* 6, 1874
*Hotel St. Romain*

MY DEAR MOTHER,—I got a telegram the night of my arrival here, saying you disapproved of the move; well, I didn't approve of it particularly myself; I only did it to be the sooner able to come home. And now—well now (I beg pardon if I am enigmatical. I can't help it just now, I hate talking about schemes that are in the wind)—well now, I may ask you to join me abroad after all: but this depends upon health and various considerations.

The weather here is much colder, but not unpleasant. Bob seems to me to have improved very much in his work; he regrets much that he had not studied at Antwerp from the first.

By the bye, there will be an article of mine in *Macmillan* for (I think) May: it's not very well done—not nearly as well as *Roads*—but I believe people will find it interesting.

I intend going to Fontainebleau or down the Seine, or somewhere thereabouts, shortly. I was awfully sorry to leave Mentone and the Russians—awfully.

Ever your afft. son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*Paris, April,* 1874

My dear Friend,—I am up again in an arm chair by the open window, the air very warm and soft and full of pleasant noise of streets. I have had a very violent cold ; the chirruppy French-English doctor who attended me, said I might compliment myself on what I had, as I might just as well have had small-pox or typhoid fever or what you will ; now, look here, with all this violent cold, my chest remains unaffected : I am bronchial a bit and cough, and I have mucous membrane raw over the best part of me and my eyes are the laughablest deformed loopholes you ever saw : and withal my lungs are all right. So you see that's good. I have not had a letter from home since I left Mentone. You know I was doing what they didn't want ; but I put myself out of my way to make it less unpleasant for them ; and surely when one is nearly 24 years of age one should be allowed to do a bit of what one wants without their quarrelling with one. I would explain the whole thing to you but believe me I am too weary. Also, please show Colvin this letter and explain to him that whenever I can I will write to him ; and that in the meantime, if it will not bind him, a note from him will be most agreeable.

Nothing can be done to assist me ; if I get permission, I shall probably go straight away to Germany without delay : by permission, I mean money.

I cannot pretend that I have been happy this while back ; but this morning I was relieved from a great part of my physical sufferings and at the same time heard you speak more determinedly about your troubles. For God's sake carry these through ; if you do, I'll promise to get better and do my work in spite of all.

*Monday.*—Last night, I set to work and Bob wrote to my dictation three or four pages of *V. Hugo's Romances :* it is d—d nonsense, but to have a brouillon is already a great

thing. If I had the health of a (———) I could still rake it together in time.

Yesterday afternoon I got quite a nice note from my father (after a fortnight's silence), with scarcely a word of anger, or vexation or anything: I don't know what to make of that. But it does not matter; as I see clearly enough that I must give up the game for the present; this morning I am so ill that I can see nothing else for it than to crawl very cautiously home; the fact is the doctor *would* give me medicine, and I think that has just put the copestone on my weakness. I just simply perspire without ceasing in big drops that I can hear falling in the bed, and I have a fine generous tic that makes my forehead into that sort of hideous damned-soul mask of bitterness and pain with which the public are already acquainted—I mean such of the public as know me. I am going to cut the doctor and sort myself; and the first warm day, I shall fly: a change of air is the only thing that will pull me through. But the North is such an error; cold I am unfit for, I cannot come cold at all. My spirits are not at all bad, I thank you; but my temper is a little embittered, and I have employed more French oaths this morning, in order to try to awaken the placid imperturbable garçon de chambre to the fact that I was angry, than I thought that I had in me.

It is curious how in some ways real pain is better than simple prostration, and uneasiness. I seem to have wakened up to meet this tic, it has put me on the alert, I come on smiling. It is so odd; a day ago, I did not care at all for life and would just as soon have died; pain comes, and—I beg pardon, sir, you have made a mistake, I shall pull through in spite and be d—d to you—that is my sentiment; I also want to make it a fact.

Tell Colvin that the instant my health is anyway together again, I shall prefer to take to plays than to anything else. I have already a good subject in Gibbon: a sort of domestic drama under the low empire; tax gatherers, slaves, cheatery, chicane, poverty; suddenly drums and sunlight and the pageantry of imperial violence: an admirable contrast, and one just suited for the stage. So

you see I shall just be in the humour to consider Diana of the Ephesians.

Ever your faithful friend,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

I shall be in London shortly, if I can ; I shall seek rooms at the Paddington Hotel, where my people were, so that on the first opportunity I can come along and see you ; if you can, I should like to see you alone, but of course, that must be how it can. I shall see you and the S. C. & show Clark my carcase & lift coins from *Portfolio*, and then slowly North by easy stages. And O ! if I could get into a sort of clean white bed in an airy room, and sleep for months, and be wakened in mid July by birds and the shadows of leaves in the room, and rise and dress myself and be quite well and strong and find that dozens of things had been dreams and were gone away for ever !

R. L. S.

## To Sidney Colvin

Written in Paris on his way home to Edinburgh. Some of our talk at Mentone had run on the scheme of a spectacle play on the story of the burning of the temple of Diana at Ephesus by Herostratus, the type of insane vanity *in excelsis*.

[*Hotel St. Romain, Paris, end of April*, 1874]

My dear Colvin,—I am a great deal better, but still have to take care. I have got quite a lot of *Victor Hugo* done ; and not I think so badly : pitching into his work has straightened me up a good deal. It is the devil's own weather but that is a trifle. I must know when *Cornhill* must see it. I can send some of it in a week easily, but I still have to read *The Laughing Man*,* and I mean to wait until I get to London and have the loan of that from you. If I buy anything more this production will not pay itself. The first part is not too well written, though it has good stuff in it.

* *L'Homme qui rit.*

My people have made no objection to my going to Göttingen ; but my body has made I think very strong objections. And you know if it is cold here, it must be colder there. It is a sore pity ; that was a great chance for me, and it is gone. I know very well that between Galitzin and this swell professor I should have become a good specialist in law and how that would have changed and bettered all my work it is easy to see ; however I must just be content to live as I have begun, an ignorant, *chic*-y penny-a-liner. May the Lord have mercy on my soul !

Going home not very well is an astonishing good hold for me. I shall simply be a prince.

Have you had any thought about Diana of the Ephesians ? I will straighten up a play for you, but it may take years. A play is a thing just like a story, it begins to disengage itself and then unrolls gradually in block. It will disengage itself some day for me and then I will send you the nugget and you will see if you can make anything out of it.—Ever yours,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

# III

## STUDENT DAYS—*Concluded*

### HOME AGAIN—LITERATURE AND LAW

### May, 1874—June, 1875

## III

## STUDENT DAYS—*Concluded*

RETURNING to Edinburgh by way of Paris in May, 1874, Stevenson went to live with his parents at Swanston and Edinburgh and resumed his reading for the Bar. Illness and absence had done much to heal his temporary estrangement from the father whom he justly loved and respected ; matters of religious difference were for the most part tacitly avoided between them ; and he lived on affectionate terms with both his parents, but could not always well control his longings for a milder air and for the company of his London friends. In his spare time during the next year he worked hard at his chosen art, trying his hand at essays, short stories, criticisms, and prose poems. In all this experimental writing he had neither the aims nor the facility of the journalist, but strove always after the higher qualities of literature, and was never satisfied with what he had done. To find for all he had to say words of vital aptness and animation—to communicate as much as possible of what he has somewhere called " the incommunicable thrill of things "—was from the first his endeavour in literature, nay more, it was the main passion of his life : and the instrument that should serve his purpose could not be forged in haste. Neither was it easy for this past master of the random, the unexpected, the brilliantly back-foremost and topsy-turvy in talk, to learn in writing the habit of orderly arrangement and organic sequence which even the lightest forms of literature cannot lack.

In the course of this summer Stevenson's excursions included a week or two spent with me at Hampstead, during which he joined the Savile Club and made some acquaint-

ance with London literary society ; a yachting trip with his friend Sir Walter Simpson in the western islands of Scotland ; a journey to Barmouth and Llandudno with his parents ; and in the late autumn a walking tour in Buckinghamshire. The Scottish winter (1874–75) tried him severely, as Scottish winters always did, but was enlivened by a new and what was destined to be for several years a very fruitful and intimate friendship, the origin of which is described in the following letters ; namely, that of Mr. W. E. Henley. In April, 1875, he made his first visit, in the company of his cousin R. A. M. Stevenson, to the artist haunts of the forest of Fontainebleau, whence he returned to finish his reading for the Scottish Bar and face the examination which was before him in July. During all this year, as will be seen, his chief, almost his exclusive, correspondents and confidants continued to be the same as in the preceding winter. I have found the sequence of the spring letters from Edinburgh and Swanston (with the first Fontainebleau episode interposed) very difficult to determine, and am far from certain of having got it more than approximately right.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

This and the following letters were written after Stevenson's return to Scotland. The essay *Ordered South* appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* for May, 1874; that on Victor Hugo's romances in the *Cornhill* for August.

*Swanston, May* 1874, *Monday*

We are now at Swanston Cottage, Lothianburn, Edinburgh. The garden is but little clothed yet, for, you know, here we are six hundred feet above the sea. It is very cold, and has sleeted this morning. Everything wintry. I am very jolly, however, having finished *Victor Hugo*, and just looking round to see what I should next take up. I have been reading Roman Law and Calvin this morning.

*Evening.*—I went up the hill a little this afternoon. The air was invigorating, but it was so cold that my scalp was sore. With this high wintry wind, and the grey sky, and faint northern daylight, it was quite wonderful to hear such a clamour of blackbirds coming up to me out of the woods, and the bleating of sheep being shorn in a field near the garden, and to see golden patches of blossom already on the furze, and delicate green shoots upright and beginning to frond out, among last year's russet bracken. Flights of crows were passing continually between the wintry leaden sky and the wintry cold-looking hills. It was the oddest conflict of seasons. A wee rabbit—this year's making, beyond question—ran out from under my feet, and was in a pretty perturbation, until he hit upon a lucky juniper and blotted himself there promptly. Evidently this gentleman had not had much experience of life.

I have made an arrangement with my people: I am to have £84 a year—I only asked for £80 on mature reflection—and as I should soon make a good bit by my pen, I shall be very comfortable. We are all as jolly as can be together, so that is a great thing gained.

*Wednesday.*—Yesterday I received a letter that gave me much pleasure from a poor fellow-student of mine, who has been all winter very ill, and seems to be but little better even now. He seems very much pleased with *Ordered South*. "A month ago," he says, "I could scarcely have

ventured to read it; to-day I felt on reading it as I did on the first day that I was able to sun myself a little in the open air." And much more to the like effect. It is very gratifying.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*Swanston* [*May*, 1874], *Friday*

AGAIN very cold. I have been out walking in a sheltered bit of the garden, in a sun-blink. When there is wind, here, it makes a wonderful noise in the trees, that fills the ear agreeably; and to-day this was broken up and accentuated with the most delightful love songs from all sorts of birds, the blackbird supreme, of course. It was delightful; one seemed to hear the whole air full of the rustle of the wings of Spring. Only it was strange it should be so cold.

I find I must write to you pretty often for dear life. I am not so strong as I thought I was and—

*Saturday*.—So far, had I written yesterday and the best thing I can do this morning is just to continue—

and I require to keep always present to my mind that there are other people, not here in Edinburgh, and that I have another life to lead all over. And you can't tell how it strengthens me to write to you and to hear from you; your letters are always tonic to me; I just say, "Very well—there she is—now look here, old man, you must be as nice as you can." It doesn't matter what, or how, you write, the effect has been always the same in that particular.

Now how am I in my turn to be tonic? The Lord knows. I have but one idea of comforting and strengthening people, and that I have already used—it is to tell them how good they are for me, how much difference they make to my life, how much of me would perish and degenerate if they and all that they have given could be taken from me. It gives a person such a feeling of responsibility (doesn't it, now?) to hear themselves thus spoken about—to know themselves thus regarded, rather—that they straighten

their shoulders and take heart of grace incontinently. I feel all changed, when I think of the people who like me for myself, and even who say I have been *good* for them (though that is a small number, God knows ; *I think one*), and all my difficulties and despondencies fall off from me like Christian's burthen, and I go on my way rejoicing.

Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO SIDNEY COLVIN

Mr. John Morley had asked for a notice by R. L. S. for the *Fortnightly Review*, which he was then editing, of Lord Lytton's newly published volume, *Fables in Song*. The notice was printed in the June number.

*Swanston, Lothianburn, Edinburgh* [*May*, 1874]

ALL right. I'll see what I can do. Before I could answer I had to see the book ; and my good father, after trying at all our libraries, bought it for me. I like the book ; that is some of it and I'll try to lick up four or five pages for the *Fortnightly*.

It is still as cold as cold, hereaway. And the Spring hammering away at the New Year in despite. Poor Spring, scattering flowers with red hands and preparing for Summer's triumphs all in a shudder herself. Health still good, and the humour for work enduring.

Jenkin wrote to say he would second me in such a kind little notelet. I shall go in for it (the Savile I mean) whether *Victor Hugo* is accepted or not, being now a man of means. Have I told you by the way that I have now an income of £84, or as I prefer to put it for dignity's sake, two thousand one hundred francs, a year ?

In lively hope of better weather and your arrival hereafter.—I remain, yours ever,

R. L. S.

## TO MRS. SITWELL

*Swanston, Wednesday, May*, 1874

STRUGGLING away at *Fables in Song*. I am much afraid I am going to make a real failure ; the time is so short, and

I am so out of the humour. Otherwise very calm and jolly : cold still *impossible*.

*Thursday*.—I feel happier about the *Fables*, and it is warmer a bit ; but my body is most decrepit, and I can just manage to be cheery and tread down hypochondria under foot by work. I lead such a funny life, utterly without interest or pleasure outside of my work : nothing, indeed, but work all day long, except a short walk alone on the cold hills, and meals, and a couple of pipes with my father in the evening. It is surprising how it suits me, and how happy I keep.

*Friday*.—" My dear Stevenson how do you do ? do you annoying yourself or no ? when we go to the Olivses it allways rememberse us you. Nelly and my aunt went away. And when the organ come and play the Soldaten it mak us think of Nelly. It is so sad ! allmoste went away. I make my baths ; and then we go to Franzensbad ; will you come to see us ? "

There is Pella's letter facsimile, punctuation, spelling, and all. Mme. Garschine's was rather sad and gave me the blues a bit ; I think it very likely I may run over to Franzensbad for a week or so this autumn, if I am wanted that is to say : I shall be able to afford it easily.

I have got on rather better with the *Fables ;* perhaps it won't be a failure, though I fear. To-day the sun shone brightly although the wind was cold : I was up the hill a good time. It is very solemn to see the top of one hill steadfastly regarding you over the shoulder of another : I never before to-day fully realised the haunting of such a gigantic face, as it peers over into a valley and seems to command all corners. I had a long talk with the shepherd about foreign lands, and sheep. A Russian had once been on the farm as a pupil ; he told me that he had the utmost pity for the Russian's capacities, since (dictionary and all) he had never managed to understand him ; it must be remembered that my friend the shepherd spoke Scotch of the broadest and often enough employs words which I do not understand myself.

*Saturday*.—I have received such a nice long letter (four

sides) from Leslie Stephen to-day about my *Victor Hugo*. It is accepted. This ought to have made me gay, but it hasn't. I am not likely to be much of a tonic to-night. I have been very cynical over myself to-day, partly, perhaps, because I have just finished some of the deedest rubbish about Lord Lytton's *Fables* that an intelligent editor ever shot into his waste-paper basket. If Morley prints it, I shall be glad, but my respect for him will be shaken.

R. L. S.

## To Sidney Colvin

Enclosing Mr. Leslie Stephen's letter accepting the article on Victor Hugo : the first of Stevenson's many contributions to the *Cornhill Magazine*.

[*Edinburgh, May*, 1874]

My dear Colvin,—I send you L. Stephen's letter which is certainly very kind and jolly to get.* I wrote some stuff

* This letter, accepting the first contribution of R. L. S., has by an accident been preserved, and is so interesting, both for its occasion and for the light it throws on the writer's care and kindness as an editor, that by permission of his representatives I here print it. '93 stands, of course, for the novel *Quatre-vingt-treize*.

15 *Waterloo Place, S.W.*, 15/5/74

Dear Sir,—I have read with great interest your article on Victor Hugo and also that which appeared in the last number of *Macmillan*. I shall be happy to accept Hugo and if I have been rather long in answering you, it is only because I wished to give a second reading to the article, and have lately been very much interrupted.

I will now venture to make a few remarks, and by way of preface I must say that I do not criticise you because I take a low view of your powers : but for the very contrary reason. I think very highly of the promise shown in your writings and therefore think it worth while to write more fully than I can often to contributors. Nor do I set myself up as a judge—I am very sensible of my own failings in the critical department and merely submit what has occurred to me for your consideration.

I fully agree with the greatest portion of your opinions and think them very favourably expressed. The following points struck me as doubtful when I read and may perhaps be worth notice.

First, you seem to make the distinction between dramatic and novelistic art coincide with the distinction between romantic and 18th century. This strikes me as doubtful, as at least to require qualification. To my mind Hugo is far more dramatic in spirit than Fielding, though his method involves (as you show exceedingly well) a use of scenery and background which would hardly be admissible in drama. I am not able—I fairly confess—to define the dramatic element in Hugo or to say why I think it absent from Fielding and Richardson. Yet surely Hugo's own dramas are a sufficient proof that a drama may be romantic as well as a novel : though, of course, the pressure of the great moral forces, etc., must be indicated by

about Lord Lytton, but I had not the heart to submit it to you. I sent it direct to Morley, with a Spartan billet. God knows it is bad enough: but it cost me labour incredible. I was so out of the vein, it would have made you weep to see me digging the rubbish out of my seven wits with groanings unutterable. I certainly mean to come to London, and likely before long if all goes well: so on that ground, I cannot force you to come to Scotland. Still, the weather is now warm and jolly, and of course it would

different means. The question is rather a curious one and too wide to discuss in a letter. I merely suggest what seems to me to be an obvious criticism on your argument.

Secondly, you speak very sensibly of the melodramatic and claptrap element in Hugo. I confess that it seems to me to go deeper into his work than you would apparently allow. I think it, for example, very palpable even in *Notre Dame*, and I doubt the historical fidelity, though my ignorance of mediæval history prevents me from putting my finger on many faults. The consequence is that in my opinion you are scarcely just to Scott or Fielding as compared with Hugo. Granting fully his amazing force and fire, he seems to me to be deficient often in that kind of healthy realism which is so admirable in Scott's best work. For example, though my Scotch blood (for I can boast of some) may prejudice me I am profoundly convinced that Balfour of Burley would have knocked M. Lantenac into a cocked hat and stormed la Tourgue if it had been garrisoned by 19×19 French spouters of platitude in half the time that Gauvain and Cimourdain took about it. In fact, Balfour seems to me to be flesh and blood and Gauvain & Co. to be too often mere personified bombast: and therefore I fancy that *Old Mortality* will outlast '93, though *Notre Dame* is far better than *Quentin Durward*, and *Les Misérables*, perhaps, better than any. This is, of course, fair matter of opinion.

Thirdly, I don't think that you quite bring out your meaning in saying that '93 is a decisive symptom. I confess that I don't quite see in what sense it decides precisely what question. A sentence or so would clear this up.

Fourthly, as a matter of form, I think (but I am very doubtful) that it might possibly have been better not to go into each novel in succession: but to group the substance of your remarks a little differently. Of course I don't want you to alter the form. I merely notice the point as suggesting a point in regard to any future article.

Many of your criticisms in detail strike me as very good. I was much pleased by your remarks on the storm in the *Travailleurs*. There was another very odd storm, as it struck me on a hasty reading, in '93, where there is mention of a beautiful summer evening and yet the wind is so high that you can't hear the tocsin. You do justice also and more than justice to Hugo's tenderness about children. That, I think, points to one great source of his power.

It would be curious to compare Hugo to a much smaller man, Chas. Reade, who is often a kind of provincial or *Daily Telegraph* Hugo. However, that would hardly do in the *Cornhill*. I shall send your article to the press and hope to use it in July. Any alterations can be made when

not be expensive to live here so long as that did not bore you. If you could see the hills out of my window to-night, you would start incontinent. However do as you will, and if the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will come to the mountain in due time, Mahomet being me and the mountain you, Q. E. D., F. R. S.—Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Swanston, May,* 1874], *Tuesday*

ANOTHER cold day; yet I have been along the hillside, wondering much at idiotic sheep, and raising partridges at every second step. One little plover is the object of my firm adherence. I pass his nest every day, and if you saw how he flies by me, and almost into my face, crying and flapping his wings, to direct my attention from his little treasure, you would have as kind a heart to him as I. To-day I saw him not, although I took my usual way; and I am afraid that some person has abused his simple wiliness and harried (as we say in Scotland) the nest. I feel much righteous indignation against such imaginary aggressor. However, one must not be too chary of the lower forms. To-day I sat down on a tree-stump at the skirt of a little strip of planting, and thoughtlessly began to dig out the touchwood with an end of twig. I found I had carried ruin, death, and universal consternation into a little community of ants: and this set me a-thinking of how close we are environed with frail lives, so that we can do nothing without spreading havoc over all manner of perishable homes and interests and affections; and so on to my favourite mood of an holy terror for all action and all inaction equally—a sort of shuddering revulsion from the necessary responsibilities of life. We must not be too

the article is in type, if any are desirable. I cannot promise definitely in advance; but at any rate it shall appear as soon as may be.

Excuse this long rigmarole and believe me to be, yours very truly,

LESLIE STEPHEN.

I shall hope to hear from you again. If ever you come to town you will find me at 8 Southwell Gardens (close to the Gloucester Road Station of the Underground). I am generally at home except from 3 to 5.

scrupulous of others, or we shall die. Conscientiousness is a sort of moral opium ; an excitant in small doses, perhaps, but at bottom a strong narcotic.

*Saturday*.—I have been two days in Edinburgh, and so had not the occasion to write to you. Morley has accepted the *Fables*, and I have seen it in proof, and think less of it than ever. However, of course, I shall send you a copy of the magazine without fail, and you can be as disappointed as you like, or the reverse if you can. I would willingly recall it if I could.

Try, by way of change, Byron's *Mazeppa ;* you will be astonished. It is grand and no mistake, and one sees through it a fire, and a passion, and a rapid intuition of genius, that makes one rather sorry for one's own generation of better writers, and—I don't know what to say ; I was going to say " smaller men " ; but that's not right ; read it, and you will feel what I cannot express. Don't be put out by the beginning ; persevere, and you will find yourself thrilled before you are at an end with it.

*Sunday*.—The white mist has obliterated the hills and lies heavily round the cottage, as though it were laying siege to it ; the trees wave their branches in the wind, with a solemn melancholy manner, like people swaying themselves to and fro in pain. I am alone in the house, all the world being gone to church ; and even in here at the side of the fire, the air clings about one like a wet blanket. Yet this morning, when I was just awake, I had thought it was going to be a fine day. First, a cock crew, loudly and beautifully and often ; then followed a long interval of silence and darkness, the grey morning began to get into my room ; and then from the other side of the garden, a blackbird executed one long flourish, and in a moment as if a spring had been touched or a sluice-gate opened, the whole garden just brimmed and ran over with bird-songs.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

### To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

In the course of June Stevenson came South as he had planned and stayed with me in quarters I then occupied at Hampstead, making new acquaintances both there and at the Savile Club, to which he had lately been elected, and getting, from a little scene he saw out of my window, the idea for part of his essay *Notes on the Movements of Young Children*. Mrs. Holiday was the wife of Henry Holiday, a painter of poetical subjects somewhat in the manner of Burne-Jones.

*Hampstead, Friday* [*June*, 1874]

My dear Mother,—I must try to write you a better letter than I had time for yesterday.

I wish somebody would explain to me the climate of Hampstead. To be so near London, and yet to be in an atmosphere more like Peebles than any other I can think of, is surely a puzzle in meteorology. Hampstead is all my fancy painted it ; it is so quiet, healthful and beautiful ; and yet one can go in and dine at the Club in three-quarters of an hour, or thereabout. I like my club very much ; the table d'hôte dinner is very good : it costs three Bobs : two soups, two fish, two entrées, two joints and two puddings ; so it is not dear ; and one meets agreeable people.

I have never told you about my health. I am very well, I have stopped my tonic now for a fortnight without harm, and I can walk a great deal more : I am better indeed not to go too much into London ; for that is wearisome ; but out here, I keep very jolly.

Appleton is editor of the *Academy*.

Bertie Sitwell has measles very slightly and they are gone, or going, somewhere to the country.

There is rather a nice article of Colvin's in this *Macmillan*. Wicked Leslie Stephen is not going to publish me for other two months, I fear.

I am getting through a good deal of work.

I do not know what more to say ; so the nice letter has again fallen through. Story. I'll tell you a story which a lady told me the other night. She and her brothers kept rabbits. Once they had no money and wanted some badly for food for the animals. What was their expedient ?

They formed themselves into a congregation, the eldest boy preached a charity sermon and they sent a hat around. They were quite pained and disappointed when they found nothing in it.

Ever your afft. son,
R. L. S.

The lady was a Mrs. Holiday, who lives up here.

### To Mrs. Sitwell

Trouble awaited Stevenson after his return

[*Swanston, June,* 1874], *Wednesday*

News reaches me that Bob is laid down with diphtheria; and you know what that means.

*Night.*—I am glad to say that I have on the whole a good account of Bob and I do hope he may pull through in spite of all. I went down and saw the doctor; but it is not thought right that I should go in to see him in case of contagion: you know it is a very contagious malady.

*Thursday.*—It is curious how calm I am in such a case. I wait with perfect composure for farther news; I can do nothing; why should I disturb myself? And yet if things go wrong I shall be in a fine way I can tell you.

How curiously we are built up into our false positions. The other day, having toothache and the black dog on my back generally, I was rude to one of the servants at the dinner-table. And nothing of course can be more disgusting than for a man to speak harshly to a young woman who will lose her place if she speak back to him; and of course I determined to apologise. Well, do you know, it was perhaps four days before I found courage enough, and I felt as red and ashamed as could be. Why? because I had been rude? not a bit of it; because I was doing a thing that would be called ridiculous in thus apologising. I did not know I had so much respect of middle-class notions before; this is my right hand which I must cut off. Hold the arm please: once—twice—thrice: the offensive member is amputated: let us hope I shall never be such a cad any more as to be ashamed of being a gentleman.

*Night.*—I suppose I must have been more affected than

I thought ; at least I found I could not work this morning and had to go out. The whole garden was filled with a high westerly wind, coming straight out of the hills and richly scented with furze—or whins, as we would say. The trees were all in a tempest and roared like a heavy surf ; the paths all strewn with fallen apple-blossom and leaves. I got a quiet seat behind a yew and went away into a meditation. I was very happy after my own fashion, and whenever there came a blink of sunshine or a bird whistled higher than usual, or a little powder of white apple-blossom came over the hedge and settled about me in the grass, I had the gladdest little flutter at my heart and stretched myself for very voluptuousness. I wasn't altogether taken up with my private pleasures, however, and had many a look down ugly vistas in the future, for Bob and others. But we must all be content and brave, and look eagerly for these little passages of happiness by the wayside, and go on afterwards, savouring them under the tongue.

*Friday*.—Our garden has grown beautiful at last, beautiful with fresh foliage and daisied grass. The sky is still cloudy and the day perhaps even a little gloomy ; but under this grey roof, in this shaded temperate light, how delightful the new summer is.

When I shall come to London must always be problematical like all my movements, and of course this sickness of Bob's makes it still more uncertain. If all goes well I may have to go to the country and take care of him in his convalescence. But I shall come shortly. Do not hurry to write to me ; I had rather *you* had ten minutes more of good, friendly sleep, than I a longer letter ; and you know I am rather partial to your letters. Yesterday, by the bye, I received the proof of *Victor Hugo ;* it is not nicely written, but the stuff is capital, I think. Modesty is my most remarkable quality, I may remark in passing.

1.30.—I was out, behind the yew hedge, reading the *Comtesse de Rudolstadt* when I found my eyes grow weary, and looked up from the book. O the rest of the quiet greens and whites, of the daisied surface ! I was very peaceful, but it began to sprinkle rain and so I fain to come

in for a moment and chat with you. By the way, I must send you *Consuelo* * ; you said you had quite forgotten it if I remember aright ; and surely a book that could divert me, when I thought myself on the very edge of the grave, from the work that I so much desired and was yet unable to do, and from many painful thoughts, should somewhat support and amuse you under all the hard things that may be coming upon you. If you should wonder why I am writing to you so voluminously, know that it is because I am not suffering myself to work, and in idleness, as in death, etc. . . .

*Saturday*.—I have had a very cruel day. I heard this morning that yesterday Bob had been very much worse and I went down to Portobello with all sorts of horrible presentiments. I was glad when I turned the corner and saw the blinds still up. He was definitely better, if the word definitely can be used about such a detestably insidious complaint. I have ordered *Consuelo* for you, and you should have it soon this week ; I mean next week of course ; I am thinking when you will receive this letter, not of now when I am writing it.

I am so tired ; but I am very hopeful. All will be well some time, if it be only when we are dead. One thing I see so clearly. Death is the end neither of joy nor sorrow. Let us pass into the clouds and come up again as grass and flowers ; we shall still be this wonderful, shrinking, sentient matter—we shall still thrill to the sun and grow relaxed and quiet after rain, and have all manner of pains and pleasures that we know not of now. Consciousness, and ganglia, and such-like, are after all but theories. And who knows ? This God may not be cruel when all is done ; he may relent and be good to us *à la fin des fins*. Think of how he tempers our afflictions to us, of how tenderly he mixes in bright joys with the grey web of trouble and care that we call our life. Think of how he gives, who takes away. Out of the bottom of the miry clay I write this ; and I look forward confidently ; I have faith after all : I believe, I hope, I *will* not have it reft from me ;

* Both the books here mentioned are by George Sand.

there *is* something good behind it all, bitter and terrible as it seems. The infinite majesty (as it will be always in regard to us the bubbles of an hour) the infinite majesty must have moments, if it were no more, of greatness ; must sometimes be touched with a feeling for our infirmities, must sometimes relent and be clement to those frail playthings that he has made, and made so bitterly alive. Must it not be so, my dear friend, out of the depths I cry ? I feel it now when I am most painfully conscious of his cruelty. He must relent. He must reward. He must give some indemnity, if it were but in the quiet of a daisy, tasting of the sun, and the soft rain and the sweet shadow of trees, for all the dire fever that he makes us bear in this poor existence. We make too much of this human life of ours. It may be that two clods together, two flowers together, two grown trees together touching each other deliciously with their spread leaves, it may be that these dumb things have their own priceless sympathies, surer and more untroubled than ours.

I don't know quite whither I have wandered. Forgive me, I feel as if I had relieved myself ; so perhaps it may not be unpleasant for you either.—Believe me, ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

### To Mrs. Sitwell

*Swanston, Sunday* [*June,* 1874]

DEAR FRIEND,—I fear to have added something to your troubles by telling you of the grief in which I find myself ; but one cannot always come to meet a friend smiling, although we should try for the best cheer possible. All today I have been very weary, resting myself after the trouble and fatigue of yesterday. The day was warm enough, but it blew a whole gale of wind ; and the noise and the purposeless rude violence of it somehow irritated and depressed me. There was good news however, though the anxiety must still be long. O peace, peace, whither are you fled and where have you carried my old quiet humour ? I am so bitter and disquiet and speak even spitefully to people.

And somehow, though I promise myself amendment, day after day finds me equally rough and sour to those about me. But this would pass with good health and good weather; and at bottom I am not unhappy; the soil is still good although it bears thorns; and the time will come again for flowers.

*Wednesday*.—I got your letter this morning and have to thank you so much for it. Bob is much better; and I do hope out of danger. To-day has been more glorious than I can tell you. It has been the first day of blue sky that we have had; and it was happiness for a week to see the clear bright outline of the hills and the glory of sunlit foliage and the darkness of green shadows, and the big white clouds that went voyaging overhead deliberately. My two cousins from Portobello were here: and they and I and Maggie ended the afternoon by lying half an hour together on a shawl. The big cloud had all been carded out into a thin luminous white gauze, miles away; and miles away too seemed the little black birds that passed between this and us as we lay with faces upturned. The similarity of what we saw struck in us a curious similarity of mood; and in consequence of the small size of the shawl, we all lay so close that we half pretended, half felt, we had lost our individualities and had become merged and mixed up in a quadruple existence. We had the shadow of an umbrella over ourselves, and when any one reached out a brown hand into the golden sunlight overhead we all feigned that we did not know whose hand it was, until at last I don't really think we quite did. Little black insects also passed over us and in the same half wanton manner we pretended we could not distinguish them from the birds. There was a splendid sunlit silence about us, and as Katherine said the heavens seemed to be dropping oil on us, or honey-dew—it was all so bland.

*Thursday evening*.—I have seen Bob again, and I was charmed at his convalescence. Le bon Dieu has been *so* bon this time; here's his health! Still the danger is not over by a good way; it is so miserable a thing for reverses.

I hear the wind outside roaring among our leafy trees

as the surf on some loud shore. The hill-top is whelmed in a passing rain-shower and the mist lies low in the valleys. But the night is warm and in our little sheltered garden it is fair and pleasant, and the borders and hedges and evergreens and boundary trees are all distinct in an equable diffusion of light from the buried moon and the day not altogether passed away. My dear friend, as I hear the wind rise and die away in that tempestuous world of foliage, I seem to be conscious of I know not what breath of creation. I know what this warm wet wind of the west betokens, I know how already, in this morning's sunshine, we could see all the hills touched and accentuated with little delicate golden patches of young fern ; how day by day the flowers thicken and the leaves unfold ; how already the year is a-tip-toe on the summit of its finished youth ; and I am glad and sad to the bottom of my heart at the knowledge. If you knew how different I am from what I was last year ; how the knowledge of you has changed and finished me, you would be glad and sad also.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The strain of anxiety recorded in the two last letters had given a shake to Stevenson's own health, and it was agreed that he should go for a yachting tour with Sir Walter Simpson in the Inner Hebrides.

[*Edinburgh, June,* 1874], *Thursday*

I HAVE been made so miserable by Chopin's *Marche funèbre*. Try two of Schubert's songs " *Ich unglückselige Atlas* " and " *Du schönes Fischermädchen* "—they are very jolly. I have read aloud my death-cycle from Walt Whitman this evening. I was very much affected myself, never so much before, and it fetched the auditory considerable. Reading these things that I like aloud when I am painfully excited is the keenest artistic pleasure I know. It does seem strange that these dependent arts—singing, acting, and in its small way reading aloud seem the best rewarded of all arts. I am sure it is more exciting for me to read

than it was for W. W. to write ; and how much more must this be so with singing.

*Friday*.—I am going in the yacht on Wednesday. I am not right yet, and I hope the yacht will set me up. I am too tired to-night to make more of it. Good-bye.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To SIDNEY COLVIN

[*Edinburgh, June*, 1874], *Friday*

MY DEAR COLVIN,—I am seedy—very seedy, I may say. I am quite unfit for any work or any pleasure ; and generally very sick. I am going away next week on Wednesday for my cruise which I hope will set me up again. I should like a proof here up to Wednesday morning, or at Greenock, Tontine Hotel, up to Friday morning, as I don't quite know my future address. I hope you are better, and that it was not that spell of work you had that did the harm. It is to my spurt of work that I am *redevable* for my harm. Walt Whitman is at the bottom of it all, *'cré nom !* What a pen I have !—a new pen, God be praised, how smoothly it functions ! Would that I could work as well. Chorus—Would that both of us could work as well—would that all of us could work as well !—Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

*P.S.*—Bob is better ; but he might be better yet. All goes smoothly except my murrained health.

## To MRS. SITWELL

During the summer Stevenson carried out his plan of taking a brief trip, as had been his custom in earlier years, on board the lighthouse yacht, *Heron*. By "little girls" toward the end of this letter he means his *Notes on the Movements of Young Children*, published in *The Portfolio* for August, 1874.

*Yacht* Heron, *Oban*
[*Early Summer*, 1874]

THE news, such as it is, has gone to Colvin ; what am I to say ? I am so stupid, I just wish to put in a word to you. I am quite happy, and very well for me. I read away a

good deal at odd times, so it isn't all waste time, and during the rest I go in hot for health, and my health is better. I work like a common sailor when it is needful, in rain and wind, without hurt, and my heart is quite stout now. I believe in the future faithfully. I am fully content and fear nothing, not death, nor weakness, nor any falling away from my own standard and yours. I shall be a man yet, and a good man, although day by day, I see more clearly by how much I still fall short of the mark of our high calling; in how much I am still selfish and peevish and a spoiled child. You will see that I am writing out of a great blackness. It is true, but it does not appall me (I don't know how to spell that word). And there is a good deal of it due to the tempest that is roaring over my head and filling the little cabin with draughts and shudderings of the air. We lie here in a good roadstead; and so do I in my own constancy. Let the wind blow.

I am so glad you like my little girls. You are the only one who will like them, or nearly so. May God bless you.

Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*Swanston* [*Summer* 1874]

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am back again here, as brown as a berry with sun, and in good form. I have been and gone and lost my portmanteau, with *Walt Whitman* in it and a lot of notes. This is a nuisance. However, I am pretty happy, only wearying for news of you and for your address.

*Friday.—À la bonne heure!* I hear where you are and that you are apparently fairish well. That is good at least. I am full of Reformation work; up to the eyes in it; and begin to feel learned. A beautiful day outside, though something cold.

R. L. S.

## To Sidney Colvin

Of the projects here mentioned, that of the little book of essays on the enjoyment of the world never took shape, nor were those contributions towards it which he printed in the *Portfolio* ever re-published until after the writer's death. *The Appeal to the*

*Clergy of the Church of Scotland* was printed in 1874, published as a pamphlet in February, 1875, and attracted, I believe, no attention whatever. The *Fables* must have been some of the earliest numbers of the series continued at odd times till near the date of his death and published posthumously : I do not know which, but should guess *The House of Eld, Yellow Paint,* and perhaps those in the vein of Celtic mystery, *The Touchstone, The Poor Thing, The Song of To-morrow.*

[*Swanston, Summer* 1874], *Tuesday*

My dear Colvin,—What is new with you ? There is nothing new with me : Knox and his females begin to get out of restraint altogether ; the subject expands so damnably, I know not where to cut it off. I have another paper for the PTFL * on the stocks : a sequel to the two others ; also, that is to say, a word in season as to contentment and a hint to the careless to look around them for disregarded pleasures. Seeley wrote to me asking me " to propose " something : I suppose he means—well, I suppose I don't know what he means. But I shall write to him (if you think it wise) when I send him this paper, saying that my writing is more a matter of God's disposition than of man's proposal ; that I had from *Roads* upward ever intended to make a little budget of little papers all with this intention before them, call it ethical or æsthetic as you will ; and thus I shall leave it to him (if he likes) to regard this little budget, as slowly they come forth, as a unity in its own small way. Twelve or twenty such essays, some of them mainly ethical and expository, put together in a little book with narrow print in each page, antique, vine leaves about, and the following title :

XII (or XX) ESSAYS ON THE ENJOYMENT OF THE WORLD
By Robert Louis Stevenson
(*A motto in italics*)
Publisher
Place and date

You know the class of old book I have in my head. I

* The *Portfolio*, an art periodical then lately started under the joint editorship of its proprietor and publisher, Mr Richmond Seeley, and of Philip Gilbert Hamerton.

smack my lips ; would it not be nice ! I am going to launch on Scotch ecclesiastical affairs, in a tract addressed to the Clergy ; in which doctrinal matters being laid aside, I contend simply that they should be just and dignified men at a certain crisis : this for the honour of humanity. Its authorship must, of course, be secret or the publication would be useless. You shall have a copy of course, and may God help you to understand it.

I have done no more to my *Fables*. I find I must let things take their time. I am constant to my schemes ; but I must work at them fitfully as the humour moves.

—To return, I wonder, if I have to make a budget of such essays as I dream, whether Seeley would publish them : I should give them unity, you know, by the doctrinal essays ; nor do I think these would be the least agreeable. You must give me your advice and tell me whether I should throw out this delicate feeler to R. S. ; or if not, what I am to say to this " proposal " business.

I shall go to England or Wales, with parents, shortly : after which, dash to Poland before setting in for the dismal session at Edinburgh.

Spirits good, with a general sense of hollowness underneath : wanity of wanities etc.—Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

*P.S.*—Parents capital ; thanks principally to them ; yours truly still rather bitter, but less so.

## To SIDNEY COLVIN

The last paragraph of the following means that Dr. Appleton, the amiable and indefatigable editor of the *Academy*, then recently founded, had been a little disturbed in mind by some of the contributions of his brilliant young friend, but allowed his academic conscience to be salved by the fact of their signature.

[*Swanston, Summer* 1874]

MY DEAR COLVIN,—Am I mad ? Have I lived thus long and have you known me thus long, to no purpose ? Do you imagine I could ever write an essay a month, or promise an essay even every three months ? I declare I would rather

die than enter into any such arrangement. The Essays must fall from me, Essay by Essay, as they ripen ; and all that my communication with Seeley would effect would be to make him see more in them than mere occasional essays ; or at least *look* far more faithfully, in which spirit men rarely look in vain. You know both *Roads* and my little girls * are a part of the scheme which dates from early at Mentone. My word to Seeley, therefore, would be to inform him of what I hope will lie ultimately behind them, of how I regard them as contributions towards a friendlier and more thoughtful way of looking about one, etc. One other purpose of telling him would be that I should feel myself more at liberty to write as I please, and not bound to drag in a tag about Art every time to make it more suitable. Tying myself down to time is an impossibility. You know my own description of myself as a person with a poetic character and no poetic talent ; just as my prose muse has all the ways of a poetic one, and I must take my Essays as they come to me. If I got 12 of 'em done in two years, I should be pleased. Never, please, let yourself imagine that I am fertile ; I am constipated in the brains.

Look here, Appleton dined here last night and was delightful after the manner of our Appleton : I was none the less pleased, because I was somewhat amused, to hear of your kind letter to him in defence of my productions. I was amused at the tranquil dishonesty with which he told me that I must put my name to all I write and then all will be well.—Yours ever,

R. L. S.

### To Mrs. Sitwell

Written on an expedition to Wales with his parents

*Train between Edinburgh and Chester, August* 8, 1874

My father and mother reading. I think I shall talk to you for a moment or two. This morning at Swanston, the

* The essay, *Notes on the Movements of Young Children.*

birds, poor creatures, had the most troubled hour or two ; evidently there was a hawk in the neighbourhood ; not one sang ; and the whole garden thrilled with little notes of warning and terror. I did not know before that the voice of the birds could be so tragically expressive. I had always heard them before express their trivial satisfaction with the blue sky and the return of daylight. Really, they almost frightened me ; I could hear mothers and wives in terror for those who were dear to them ; it was easy to translate, I wish it were as easy to write ; but it is very hard in this flying train, or I would write you more.

*Chester*.—I like this place much ; but somehow I feel glad when I get among the quiet eighteenth century buildings, in cosy places with some elbow room about them, after the older architecture. This other is bedevilled and furtive ; it seems to stoop ; I am afraid of trap-doors, and could not go pleasantly into such houses. I don't know how much of this is legitimately the effect of the architecture ; little enough possibly ; possibly far the most part of it comes from bad historical novels and the disquieting statuary that garnishes some façades.

On the way, to-day, I passed through my dear Cumberland country. Nowhere to as great a degree can one find the combination of lowland and highland beauties ; the outline of the blue hills is broken by the outline of many tumultuous tree-clumps ; and the broad spaces of moorland are balanced by a network of deep hedgerows that might rival Suffolk, in the foreground.—How a railway journey shakes and discomposes one, mind and body ! I grow blacker and blacker in humour as the day goes on ; and when at last I am let out, and have the fresh air about me, it is as though I were born again, and the sick fancies flee away from my mind like swans in spring.

I want to come back on what I have said about eighteenth century and middle-age houses : I do not know if I have yet explained to you the sort of loyalty, of urbanity, that there is about the one to my mind ; the spirit of a country orderly and prosperous, a flavour of the presence of magistrates and well-to-do merchants in bag-wigs, the clink of

glasses at night in fire-lit parlours, something certain and civic and domestic, is all about these quiet, staid, shapely houses, with no character but their exceeding shapeliness, and the comely external utterance that they make of their internal comfort. Now the others are, as I have said, both furtive and bedevilled ; they are sly and grotesque ; they combine their sort of feverish grandeur with their sort of secretive baseness, after the manner of a Charles the Ninth. They are peopled for me with persons of the same fashion. Dwarfs and sinister people in cloaks are about them ; and I seem to divine crypts, and, as I said, trap-doors. O God be praised that we live in this good daylight and this good peace.

*Barmouth, August 9th.*—To-day we saw the cathedral at Chester ; and, far more delightful, saw and heard a certain inimitable verger who took us round. He was full of a certain recondite, far-away humour that did not quite make you laugh at the time, but was somehow laughable to recollect. Moreover, he had so far a just imagination, and could put one in the right humour for seeing an old place, very much as, according to my favourite text, Scott's novels and poems do for one. His account of the monks in the Scriptorium, with their cowls over their heads, in a certain sheltered angle of the cloister where the big cathedral building kept the sun off the parchments, was all that could be wished ; and so too was what he added of the others pacing solemnly behind them and dropping, ever and again, on their knees before a little shrine there is in the wall, " to keep 'em in the frame of mind." You will begin to think me unduly biassed in this verger's favour if I go on to tell you his opinion of me. We got into a little side chapel, whence we could hear the choir children at practice, and I stopped a moment listening to them, with, I daresay, a very bright face, for the sound was delightful to me. " Ah," says he, " you're *very* fond of music." I said I was. " Yes, I could tell that by your head," he answered. " There's a deal in that head." And he shook his own solemnly. I said it might be so, but I found it hard, at least, to get it out. Then my father cut in brutally, said anyway I had no

ear, and left the verger so distressed and shaken in the foundations of his creed that, I hear, he got my father aside afterwards and said he was sure there was something in my face, and wanted to know what it was, if not music. He was relieved when he heard that I occupied myself with literature (which word, note here, I do now spell correctly). Good-night, and here's the verger's health !

*Friday*.—Yesterday received the letter you know of. I have finished my *Portfolio* paper, not very good but with things in it : I don't know if they will take it ; and I have got a good start made with my *John Knox* articles. The weather here is rainy and miserable and windy : it is warm and not over boisterous for a certain sort of pleasure. This place, as I have made my first real inquisition into it to-night, is curious enough ; all the days I have been here, I have been at work, and so I was quite new to it.

*Saturday*.—A most beautiful day. We took a most beautiful drive, also up the banks of the river. The heather and furze are in flower at once and make up a splendid richness of colour on the hills ; the trees were beautiful ; there was a bit of winding road with larches on one hand and oaks on the other ; the oaks were in shadow and printed themselves off at every corner on the sunlit background of the larches. We passed a little family of children by the roadside. The youngest of all sat a good way apart from the others on the summit of a knoll ; it was ensconced in an old tea-box, out of which issued its head and shoulders in a blue cloak and scarlet hat. O if you could have seen its dignity ! It was deliciously humorous : and this little piece of comic self-satisfaction was framed in wonderfully by the hills and the sunlit estuary. We saw another child in a cottage garden. She had been sick, it seemed, and was taking the air quietly for health's sake. Over her pale face, she had decorated herself with all available flowers and weeds ; and she was driving one chair as a horse, sitting in another by way of carriage. We cheered her as we passed, and she acknowledged the compliment like a queen. I like children better every day, I think, and most other things less. *John Knox* goes on, and a horrible story

of a nurse which I think almost too cruel to go on with: I wonder why my stories are always so nasty. I am still well, and in good spirits. I say, by the way, have you any means of finding Madame Garschine's address. If you have, communicate with me. I fear my last letter has been too late to catch her at Franzensbad; and so I shall have to go without my visit altogether, which would vex me.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Barmouth, September,* 1874], *Tuesday*

I WONDER if you ever read Dickens' Christmas books? I don't know that I would recommend you to read them, because they are too much perhaps. I have only read two of them yet, and feel so good after them and would do anything, yes and shall do anything, to make it a little better for people. I wish I could lose no time; I want to go out and comfort some one; I shall never listen to the nonsense they tell one about not giving money—I *shall* give money; not that I haven't done so always, but I shall do it with a high hand now.

It is raining here; and I have been working at *John Knox*, and at the horrid story I have in hand, and walking in the rain. Do you know this story of mine is horrible; I only work at it by fits and starts, because I feel as if it were a sort of crime against humanity—it is so cruel.

*Wednesday.*—I saw such nice children again to-day; one little fellow alone by the roadside, putting a stick into a spout of water and singing to himself—so wrapt up that we had to poke him with our umbrellas to attract his attention; and again, two solid, fleshly, grave, double-chinned burgomasters in black, with black hats on 'em riding together in what they call, I think, a double perambulator. My father is such fun here. He is always skipping about into the drawing-room, and speaking to all the girls, and telling them God knows what about us all. My mother and I are the old people who sit aloof, receive him as a sort of prodigal

when he comes back to us, and listen indulgently to what he has to tell.

*Llandudno, Thursday.*—A cold bleak place of stucco villas with wide streets to let the wind in at you. A beautiful journey, however, coming hither.

*Friday.*—Seeley has taken my paper, which is, as I now think, not to beat about the bush, bad. However, there are pretty things in it, I fancy; we shall see what you shall say.

*Sunday.*—I took my usual walk before turning in last night, and dallied over it a little. It was a cool, dark, solemn night, starry, but the sky charged with big black clouds. The lights in house windows you could see, but the houses themselves were lost in the general blackness. A church clock struck eleven as I went past, and rather startled me. The whiteness of the road was all I had to go by. I heard an express train roaring away down the coast into the night, and dying away sharply in the distance; it was like the noise of an enormous rocket, or a shot world, one would fancy. I suppose the darkness made me a little fanciful; but when at first I was puzzled by this great sound in the night, between sea and hills, I thought half seriously that it might be a world broken loose—this world to wit. I stood for I suppose five seconds with this looking-for of destruction in my head, not exactly frightened but put out; and I wanted badly not to be overwhelmed where I was, unless I could cry out a farewell with a great voice over the ruin and make myself heard.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

"John Knox" and "J. K." herein mentioned are the two papers on *John Knox and his Relations with Women*, first printed in *Macmillan's Magazine* and afterwards in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*.

*Swanston, Wednesday* [*Autumn*, 1874]

I HAVE been hard at work all yesterday, and besides had to write a long letter to Bob, so I found no time until quite

late, and then was sleepy. Last night it blew a fearful gale ; I was kept awake about a couple of hours, and could not get to sleep for the horror of the wind's noise ; the whole house shook ; and, mind you, our house *is* a house, a great castle of jointed stone that would weigh up a street of English houses ; so that when it quakes, as it did last night, it means something. But the quaking was not what put me about ; it was the horrible howl of the wind round the corner ; the audible haunting of an incarnate anger about the house ; the evil spirit that was abroad ; and, above all, the shuddering silent pauses when the storm's heart stands dreadfully still for a moment. O how I hate a storm at night ! They have been a great influence in my life, I am sure ; for I can remember them so far back—long before I was six at least, for we left the house in which I remember listening to them times without number when I was six. And in those days the storm had for me a perfect impersonation, as durable and unvarying as any heathen deity. I always heard it, as a horseman riding past with his cloak about his head, and somehow always carried away, and riding past again, and being baffled yet once more, *ad infinitum*, all night long. I think I wanted him to get past, but I am not sure ; I know only that I had some interest either for or against in the matter ; and I used to lie and hold my breath, not quite frightened, but in a state of miserable exaltation.

My first *John Knox* is in proof, and my second is on the anvil. It is very good of me so to do ; for I want so much to get to my real tour and my sham tour, the real tour first ; it is always working in my head, and if I can only turn on the right sort of style at the right moment, I am not much afraid of it. One thing bothers me ; what with hammering at this J. K., and writing necessary letters, and taking necessary exercise (that even not enough, the weather is so repulsive to me, cold and windy), I find I have no time for reading except times of fatigue, when I wish merely to relax myself. O—and I read over again for this purpose Flaubert's *Tentation de St. Antoine ;* it struck me a good deal at first, but this second time it has fetched me im-

mensely. I am but just done with it, so you will know the large proportion of salt to take with my present statement, that it's the finest thing I ever read! Of course, it isn't that, it's full of *longueurs*, and is not quite "redd up," as we say in Scotland, not quite articulated; but there are splendid things in it.

I say, *do* take your macaroni with oil: *do, please*. It's *beastly* with butter.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

Mr. (later Sir) George Grove was for some years before and after this date the editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* (but the true monument to his memory is of course his *Dictionary of Music*). After the Knox articles no more contributions from R. L. S. appeared in this magazine, partly, I think, because Mr. Alexander Macmillan disapproved of his essay on Burns published the following year. The *Portfolio* paper here mentioned is that entitled *On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places*.

[*Swanston, Autumn* 1874], *Thursday*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have another letter from Grove, about my *John Knox*, which is flattering in its way: he is a very gushing and spontaneous person. I am busy with another *Portfolio* paper for which I can find no name; I think I shall require to leave it without.

I am afraid I shall not get to London on my way to Poland, but I must try to manage it on my way back; I must see you anyway, before I tackle this sad winter work, just to get new heart. As it is, I am as jolly as three, in good health, fairish working trim and on good, very good, terms with my people.

Look here, I must have people well. If they will keep well, I am all right: if they won't—well I'll do as well as I can, and forgive them, and try to be something of a comfortable thought in spite. So with that cheerful sentiment, good-night dear friend and good health to you.

*Saturday*.—Your letter to-day. Thank you. It is a horrid day, outside. You talk of my setting to a book, as if

I could; don't you know that things must *come* to me? I can do but little; I mostly wait and look out. I am struggling with a *Portfolio* paper just now, which will not come straight somehow and *will* get too gushy; but a little patience will get it out of the kink and sober it down I hope. I have been thinking over my movements, and am not sure but that I may get to London on my way to Poland after all. Hurrah! But we must not halloo till we are out of the wood; this may be only a clearing.

God help us all, it is a funny world. To see people skipping all round us with their eyes sealed up with indifference, knowing nothing of the earth or man or woman, going automatically to offices and saying they are happy or unhappy out of a sense of duty, I suppose, surely at least from no sense of happiness or unhappiness, unless perhaps they have a tooth that twinges, is it not like a bad dream? Why don't they stamp their foot upon the ground and awake? There is the moon rising in the east, and there is a person with their heart broken and still glad and conscious of the world's glory up to the point of pain; and behold they know nothing of all this! I should like to kick them into consciousness, for damp gingerbread puppets as they are. S. C. is down on me for being bitter; who can help it sometimes, especially after they have slept ill?

I am going to have a lot of lunch presently; and then I shall feel all right again, and the loneliness will pass away as often before. It is the flesh that is weak. Already I have done myself all the good in the world by this scribble, and feel alive again and pretty jolly.

*Sunday.*—What a day! Cold and dark as midwinter. I shall send with this two new photographs of myself for your opinion. My father regards this life "as a shambling sort of omnibus which is taking him to his hotel." Is that not well said? It came out in a rather pleasant and entirely amicable discussion which we had this afternoon on a walk. The colouring of the world, to-day, is of course hideous; we saw only one pleasant sight, a couple of lovers under a thorn-tree by the wayside, he with his arm about her waist: they did not seem to find it so cold as we. I have

made a lot of progress to-day with my *Portfolio* paper. I think some of it should be nice, but it rambles a little ; I like rambling, if the country be pleasant ; don't you ?— Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO MRS. SITWELL

*Edinburgh* [*Late Autumn*, 1874], *Saturday*

I HAVE found what should interest you. A paper in which I had sketched out my life, before I knew you. Here is the exact copy even to the spelling ; the incertitude of the date is characteristic :—

" I think now, this 5th or 6th of April, 1873, that I can see my future life. I think it will run stiller and stiller year by year ; a very quiet desultorilly studious existence. If God only gives me tolerable health, I think now I shall be very happy ; work and science calm the mind and stop gnawing in the brain, and as I am glad to say that I do now recognise that I shall never be a great man, I may set myself peacefully on a smaller journey ; not without hope of coming to the inn before nightfall.

O dass mein Leben
Nach diesem Ziel ein ewig Wandeln sey !

DESIDERATA

1. Good health.
2. 2 to 3 hundred a year
3. O du lieber Gott, *friends !*

Amen.

Robert Louis Stevenson."

I can't quite say that I know what the " inn " was, therein referred to, but I think I do. It was rather an interesting find, wasn't it ?

I am all right now, having got hard to work at this story. I am not quite sure that it will do ; it seems to me

so much more talking about a story than telling it. However, it amuses me in the meantime, and, of course, I am no judge.

*Monday*.—Do you know, I think you will like my heroine. I feel almost as if she were going to be a success. The story, as a story, I repudiate and condemn without pity. It is no story. However, in time I begin to think I may be able to write a good long tale worth reading. I am pleased with the result of this attempt.

I have newly come in from an orchestral concert, and I *must* tell you of that. I got a loan of two shillings returned to me to-day—very opportunely, was it not?—and immediately spent one of them in a ticket for this concert. There were three things—the three last numbers I stayed to hear—that were profoundly delightful to me. The first was a symphony of Mozart's—thoroughly Mozartian, and of the colour and scent of rose-leaves. The second was Cherubini's overture to Anacreon; and that seemed to me the colour of green bronze. I know you will not laugh at these far-fetched analogies of mine; but for the third, I can give you none. It was a "Jota Aragonese" by one Glinka; and it was better than gold; yea, than much fine gold. If you have a chance, for Christ's sake go to hear it. It is the breath of man's nostrils.

Among the many stories begun and thrown aside by Stevenson in these prentice days, I do not think it is possible to make sure of the title or subject of that above mentioned; but it is probably the same as the "horrible story of a nurse" referred to in his published letter from Barmouth of the same date *Letters*, vol. I, p. 177, Scribner Edition, 1911).

The letter next following is written not on note-paper but on a couple of pages torn from a ruled memorandum book, and is dated only by the day of the week; the visit to London to which it looks forward would seem to be that recorded in *Letters*, vol. I, p. 187, Scribner Edition, 1911.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, November,* 1874]

Tuesday, up in my room, with nothing else to write upon but this.

I have discovered why I get on always so ill, am always so nasty, so much worse than myself, with my parents; it is because they always take me at my worst, seek out my faults, and never give me any credit. You remember, perhaps, at least I remember, I once wrote to you to tell you how you should do with me; how it was only by getting on my weak side, looking for the best, and always taking it for granted that I should do the best before it is done, that you ever will get the best out of me. This is profoundly true; and I see it on the other side with my parents; I am always bad with them, because they always seem to expect me to be not very good; and I am never good, because they never seem to see when I am good. I shall be in London this week, or early next: Isn't this good news? and I think we shall pass a few happy days; I want you to be the better of my visit, if only it is possible—do you think it is? I think so, and mean to make it so. Poland, by the way, I have pretty nigh-hand given up: it looks more and more impossible. Also, I have another difficulty, and a great one, with Mme. Z.; however, I think I see my way through it, and you will tell me if I am right. In a few days, I hope—hurrah, hurrah, que je suis bien aise; You shall get better and be fit for your work and do it well—you *shall* get better.

Ever your faithful friend,
Robert Louis Stevenson.

Due in London, Euston, 2.30 on Thursday. Shall go to Savile Club for orders; do have orders for me there, and let them be to come early.

To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

*Euston & Victoria Hotels, Euston Station*
*October* 16, 1874

My dear Mother,—I am so sorry that I shall not be able to be home on Saturday night ; I must wait other twelve hours ; it would be nonsense just to miss Colvin after so long ; so it will be Sunday morning before I am back.

I had a very nice time at Oxford and in Buckinghamshire —Bucks is, I believe, the knowing way to refer to it. And I say, you must not be vexed at my absences. You must understand (I want to say this in a letter) that I shall be a nomad, more or less, until my days be done. You don't know how much I used to long for it in old days ; how I used to go and look at the trains leaving, and wish to go with them. And now, you know, that I have a little more that is solid under my feet, you must take my nomadic habits as a part of me. Just wait until I am in swing ; and you will see I shall pass more of my life with you than elsewhere ; only, take me as I am, and give me line. I *must* be a bit of a vagabond ; it's your own fault after all, isn't it ? You shouldn't have had a tramp for a son !

I was sucking up this evening at the Savile, to my present ideal of all that is good and great in humanity—one Markheim, a Pole with an Irish mother ; at the bar and an Oxford Don ; and a man, as I say, whom I adore—for the immediate present. Masson was dining opposite, but he was with a party so I had no opportunity of introducing myself. Besides I was so down on my Pole !

Ever your afft. son,
Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Mrs. Sitwell

[*October* 27, 1874], *Edinburgh, Thursday*

It is cold, but very sunshiny and dry ; I wish you were here ; it would suit you and it doesn't suit me ; if we could change ? This is the Fast day—Thursday preceding bi-

annual Holy Sacrament that is—nobody does any work, they go to Church twice, they read nothing secular (except the newspapers, that is the nuance between Fast day and Sunday), they eat like fighting-cocks. Behold how good a thing it is and becoming well to fast in Scotland. I am progressing with *John Knox and Women* No. 2; I shall finish it, I think, in a fortnight hence; and then I shall begin to enjoy myself. *J. K. and W.* No. 2 is not uninteresting however; it only bores me because I am so anxious to be at something else which I like better. I shall perhaps go to Church this afternoon from a sort of feeling that it is rather a wholesome thing to do of an afternoon; it keeps one from work and it lets you out so late that you cannot weary yourself walking and so spoil your evening's work.

*Friday.*—I got your letter this morning, and whether owing to that, or to the fact that I had spent the evening before in comparatively riotous living, I managed to work five hours and a half well and without fatigue; besides reading about an hour more at history. This is a thing to be proud of.

We have had lately some of the most beautiful sunsets; our autumn sunsets here are always admirable in colour. To-night there was just a little lake of tarnished green deepening into a blood-orange at the margins, framed above by dark clouds and below by the long roof-line of the Egyptian buildings on what we call the Mound, the statues on the top (of her Britannic Majesty and diverse nondescript Sphinxes) printing themselves off black against the lit space.

*Saturday.*—It has been colder than ever; and to-night there is a truculent wind about the house, shaking the windows and making a hollow inarticulate grumbling in the chimney. I cannot say how much I hate the cold. It makes my scalp so tight across my head and gives me such a beastly rheumatism about my shoulders, and wrinkles and stiffens my face; O I have such a *Sehnsucht* for Mentone, where the sun is shining and the air still, and (a friend writes to me) people are complaining of the heat.

*Sunday*.—I was chased out by my lamp again last night; it always goes out when I feel in the humour to write to you. To-day I have been to Church, which has not improved my temper I must own. The clergyman did his best to make me hate him, and I took refuge in that admirable poem the Song of Deborah and Barak; I should like to make a long scroll of painting (say to go all round a cornice) illustrative of this poem; with the people seen in the distance going stealthily on footpaths while the great highways go vacant; with the archers besetting the draw-wells; with the princes in hiding on the hills among the bleating sheep-flocks; with the overthrow of Sisera, the stars fighting against him in their courses and that ancient river, the river Kishon, sweeping him away in anger; with his mother looking and looking down the long road in the red sunset, and never a banner and never a spear-clump coming into sight, and her women with white faces round her, ready with lying comfort. To say nothing of the people on white asses.

O, I do hate this damned life that I lead. Work—work—work; that's all right, it's amusing; but I want women about me and I want pleasure. John Knox had a better time of it than I, with his godly females all leaving their husbands to follow after him; I would I were John Knox; I hate living like a hermit. Write me a nice letter if ever you are in the humour to write to me, and it doesn't hurt your head. Good-bye.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The projected visit to his Russian friend in Poland did not come off, and shortly after the preceding letter Stevenson went for a few days' walking tour in the Chiltern Hills of Buckinghamshire as recorded in his essay, *An Autumn Effect*. He then came on for a visit to London.

[*London, November*, 1874]

WHEN I left you I found an organ-grinder in Russell Square playing to a child; and the simple fact that there

was a child listening to him, that he was giving this pleasure, entitled him, according to my theory, as you know, to some money ; so I put some coppers on the ledge of his organ, without so much as looking at him, and I was going on when a woman said to me : " Yes sir, he do look bad, don't he ? scarcely fit like to be working." And then I looked at the man, and O ! he was so ill, so yellow and heavy-eyed and drooping. I did not like to go back somehow, and so I gave the woman a shilling and asked her to give it to him for me. I saw her do so and walked on ; but the face followed me, and so when I had got to the end of the division, I turned and came back as hard as I could and filled his hand with money—ten to thirteen shillings, I should think. I was sure he was going to be ill, you know, and he was a young man ; and I daresay he was alone, and had no one to love him.

I had my reward ; for a few yards farther on, here was another organ-grinder playing a dance tune, and perhaps a dozen children all danci g merrily to his music, singly, and by twos and threes, and in pretty little figures together. Just what my organ-grinder in my story wanted to have happen to him ! It was so gay and pleasant in the twilight under the street lamp.

I am very well, have eaten well and am so sleepy I can write no more. This I write to let you know I am no worse ; all the better.—Ever your faithful friend,

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, November,* 1874], *Sunday*

I was never more sorry to leave you, but I never left you with a better heart, than last night. I had a long journey and a cold one ; but never was sick nor sorry the whole way. It was a long one because when we got to Berwick, we had to go round through the hills by Kelso, as there was a block on the main line. I knew nothing of this, and you may imagine my bewilderment when I came

to myself, the train standing and whistling dismally in the black morning, before a little vacant half-lit station, with a name up that I had never heard before. My fellow-traveller woke up and wanted to know what was wrong. "O, it's nothing," I said, "nothing at all, it's an evil dream." However we had the thing explained to us at the end of ends, and trailed on in the dark among the snowy hills, stopping every now and again and whistling in an appealing kind of way, as much as to say, "God knows where we are, for God's sake don't run into us"; until at last we came to a dead standstill, and remained so for perhaps an hour and a quarter. This wakened us up for a little; and we managed, at last, to attract the attention of one of the officials whom we could see picking their way about the snow with lanterns. This man (very wide awake, and hale, and lusty) informed us we were waiting for another conductor, as our own guard did not know the line. "Where is the new guard coming from?" we ask. "O, close by; only—he, he—he was married last night." And immediately we heard much hoarse laughter in the dark about us; and the moving lanterns were shaken to and fro, as if in a wind. This poor conductor! However, I recomposed myself for slumber, and did not re-awake much before Edinburgh, where I was discharged three hours too late and found my father waiting for me in the snow, with a very long face.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

*Swanston, Thursday* [*Autumn*, 1874]

MY DEAR FRIEND,—One thing I desire to say; you talked, in your last, almost apologetically of what you had told me about yourself. Surely this is wrong up to the point of being nearly unkind. *A la fin*, you may surely make me somewhat of a confidant.

Also—I trust I also am to you one of those "whom you cannot deceive even for their own happiness." I believe so at least; so if you do, it will be a breach of confidence.

*Friday*.—I get most vexatious news from Colvin: he is not so well as he has been, and you, I hear, not so well as I had thought you were.

*Saturday*.—I am all right in spirits; but I was put out with last night's news, and didn't sleep extra, so the flesh is weak. You see I tell you how things affect me, that you may have no excuse ever to deceive me. Don't do that; it is what I could not recover if I found it out, and the fear of it haunts me. Believe me in this. This dread that sometime I shall be thus dealt with, for my own good, is what makes the worst of my troubles just now; it is the one thing I don't like to look in the face: it makes me shudder. I was amused to find out the other day that I inherit this weakness from my father.

O!—I'll tell you something funny. You know how rarely I can see your face: well, last night I kept dreaming I saw you arrive at the Finchley Road Station, as you did the afternoon before I left: and I never could catch more than a glimpse of your face before it turned into somebody else's—a horrible, *Scotch* face, commonplace and bitter.

You don't know how I yearned to-day to see you all. I feel myself in the uttermost parts of the earth, alone with ugly puppets, and my heart just melts within me when I think of you, and S. C., and Mme. G., and Bob. Any of the four of you I want to see badly; and somehow S. C. most, I feel as if I could be good for him and am so vexed that he is not well.

## To Sidney Colvin

I forget what the Japanese prints were which I had been sending to Stevenson at his wish, but they sound like specimens of Hiroshigé and Kuniyoshi. The taste for these things was then new and had laid hold on him strongly.

[*Edinburgh, November*, 1874]

My dear Colvin,—Thank you, and God bless you for ever: this is a far better lot than the last; I have chosen four complete sets out of it for setting, quite admirable: the others are not quite one's taste; I find the colour far

from always being agreeable, it is a great toss up. They have sent me duplicates of first a mad little scene with a white horse, a red monarch and a blue arm of the sea in it ; and second of a night scene with water, flowers and a black and white umbrella and a wonderful grey distance and a wonderful general effect—one of my best in fact. Do not now force yourself to make any more purchases for me ; but if ever you see a thing you would like to lecture off, remember I am the person who is ready to buy it and let you have the use of it : keep this in view *always*.

I am working very hard (for me) and am very happy over my picters.

Good-bye, *mon vieux*.—Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

*P.S.*—In fact if ever you see anything exceptionally fine, purchase for R. L. S. I owe you lots of money besides this, don't I ? *John Knox* is red and sparkling on the anvil and the hammer goes about six hours on him.

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

During his days in London Stevenson had gone with Mrs. Sitwell to revisit the Elgin marbles, and had carried off photographs of them to put up in his room at Edinburgh. *King Matthias's Hunting Horn* has perished like so many other stories of this time.

[*Edinburgh, November*, 1874], *Tuesday*

WELL, I've got some women now, and they're better than nothing. Three, without heads, who have been away getting framed. And you know they are more to me, after a fashion, than they can be to you, because, after a fashion also, they are women. I have come now to think the sitting figure in spite of its beautiful drapery rather a blemish, rather an interruption to the sentiment. The two others are better than one has ever dreamed ; I think these two women are the only things in the world that have been better than, in Bible phrase, it had entered into my heart to conceive. Who made them ? Was it Pheidias ? or do they

not know? It is wonderful what company they are—noble company. And then I have now three Japanese pictures that are after my own heart, and I get up from time to time and turn a bit of favourite colour over and over, roll it under my tongue, savour it till it gets all through me; and then back to my chair and to work.

This afternoon about six there was a small orange moon, lost in a great world of blue evening. A few leafless boughs, and a bit of garden railing, criss-cross its face; and below it there was blueness and the spread lights of Leith, lost in blue haze. To the east, the town, also subdued to the same blue, piled itself up, with here and there a lit window, until it could print off its outline against a faint patch of green and russet that remained behind the sunset.

I must tell you about my way of life, which is regular to a degree. Breakfast 8.30; during breakfast and my smoke afterwards till ten, when I begin work, I read Reformation; from ten, I work until about a quarter to one; from one until two, I lunch and read a book on Schopenhauer or one on Positivism; two to three work, three to six anything; if I am in before six, I read about Japan: six, dinner and a pipe with my father and coffee until 7.30; 7.30 to 9.30, work; after that either supper and a pipe at home, or out to Simpson's or Baxter's: bed between eleven and twelve.

*Wednesday*.—Two good things have arrived to me to-day: your letter for one, and the end of *John Knox* for another. I cannot write English because I have been speaking French all evening with some French people of my knowledge. It's a sad thing the state I get into, when I cannot remember English and yet do not know French! And it is worse when it is complicated, as at present, with a pen that will not write! If you knew how I have to paint and how I have to manœuvre to get the stuff legible at all.

*Thursday*.—I have said the Fates are only women after a fashion; and that is one of the strangest things about them. They are wonderfully womanly—they are more womanly than any woman—and those girt draperies are drawn over a wonderful greatness of body instinct with sex; I do not see a line in them that could be a line in a

man. And yet, when all is said, they are not women for us ; they are of another race, immortal, separate ; one has no wish to look at them with love, only with a sort of lowly adoration, physical, but wanting what is the soul of all love, whether admitted to oneself or not, hope ; in a word " the desire of the moth for the star." O great white stars of eternal marble, O shapely, colossal women, and yet not women. It is not love that we seek from them, we do not desire to see their great eyes troubled with our passions, or the great impassive members contorted by any hope or pain or pleasure ; only now and again, to be conscious that they exist, to have knowledge of them far off in cloudland or feel their steady eyes shining, like quiet watchful stars, above the turmoil of the earth.

I write so ill ; so cheap and miserable and penny-a-linerish is this *John Knox* that I have just sent, that I am low. Only I keep my heart up by thinking of you. And if all goes to the worst, shall I not be able to lay my head on the great knees of the middle Fate—O these great knees—I know all Baudelaire meant now with his *géante*—to lay my head on her great knees and go to sleep.

*Friday*.—I have finished *The Story of King Matthias' Hunting Horn*, whereof I spoke to you, and I think it should be good. It excites me like wine, or fire, or death, or love, or something ; nothing of my own writing ever excited me so much ; it does seem to me so weird and fantastic.

*Saturday*.—I know now that there is a more subtle and dangerous sort of selfishness in habit than there ever can be in disorder. I never ceased to be generous when I was most *déréglé ;* now when I am beginning to settle into habits, I see the danger in front of me—one might cease to be generous and grow hard and sordid in time and trouble. However, thank God it is life I want, and nothing posthumous, and for two good emotions I would sacrifice a thousand years of fame. Moreover I know so well that I shall never be much as a writer that I am not very sorely tempted.

My only chance is in my stories ; and so you will forgive me if I postpone everything else to copy out *King Matthias ;*

I have learned by experience that a story should be copied out and finished fairly off at the first heat if ever. I am even thinking of finishing up half-a-dozen perhaps and trying the publishers? what do you say? Give me your advice?

*Sunday*.—Good-bye. A long story to tell but no time to tell it: well and happy. Adieu.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To MRS. SITWELL

*Edinburgh* [*Sunday, November*, 1874]

HERE is my long story: yesterday night, after having supped, I grew so restless that I was obliged to go out in search of some excitement. There was a half-moon lying over on its back, and incredibly bright in the midst of a faint grey sky set with faint stars: a very inartistic moon, that would have damned a picture.

At the most populous place of the city I found a little boy, three years old perhaps, half frantic with terror, and crying to every one for his "Mammy." This was about eleven, mark you. People stopped and spoke to him, and then went on, leaving him more frightened than before. But I and a good-humoured mechanic came up together; and I instantly developed a latent faculty for setting the hearts of children at rest. Master Tommy Murphy (such was his name) soon stopped crying, and allowed me to take him up and carry him; and the mechanic and I trudged away along Princes Street to find his parents. I was soon so tired that I had to ask the mechanic to carry the bairn; and you should have seen the puzzled contempt with which he looked at me, for knocking in so soon. He was a good fellow, however, although very impracticable and sentimental; and he soon bethought him that Master Murphy might catch cold after his excitement, so he wrapped him up in my greatcoat. "Tobauga (Tobago) Street" was the address he gave us; and we deposited him in a little

grocer's shop and went through all the houses in the street without being able to find any one of the name of Murphy. Then I set off to the head police office, leaving my great-coat in pawn about Master Murphy's person. As I went down one of the lowest streets in the town, I saw a little bit of life that struck me. It was now half-past twelve, a little shop stood still half-open, and a boy of four or five years old was walking up and down before it imitating cockcrow. He was the only living creature within sight.

At the police offices no word of Master Murphy's parents; so I went back empty-handed. The good groceress, who had kept her shop open all this time, could keep the child no longer; her father, bad with bronchitis, said he must forth. So I got a large scone with currants in it, wrapped my coat about Tommy, got him up on my arm, and away to the police office with him; not very easy in my mind, for the poor child, young as he was—he could scarce speak—was full of terror for the "office," as he called it. He was now very grave and quiet and communicative with me; told me how his father thrashed him, and divers household matters. Whenever he saw a woman on our way he looked after her over my shoulder and then gave his judgment: "That's no' *her*," adding sometimes, "She has a wean wi' her." Meantime I was telling him how I was going to take him to a gentleman who would find out his mother for him quicker than ever I could, and how he must not be afraid of him, but be brave, as he had been with me. We had just arrived at our destination—we were just under the lamp—when he looked me in the face and said appealingly, "He'll no' put me in the office?" And I had to assure him that he would not, even as I pushed open the door and took him in.

The sergeant was very nice, and I got Tommy comfortably seated on a bench, and spirited him up with good words and the scone with the currants in it; and then, telling him I was just going out to look for Mammy, I got my greatcoat and slipped away.

Poor little boy! he was not called for, I learn, until ten this morning. This is very ill written, and I've missed half

that was picturesque in it ; but to say truth, I am very tired and sleepy : it was two before I got to bed. However, you see, I had my excitement.

*Monday*.—I have written nothing all morning ; I cannot settle to it. Yes—I *will* though.

10.45.—And I did. I want to say something more to you about the three women. I wonder so much why they should have been *women*, and halt between two opinions in the matter. Sometimes I think it is because they were made by a man for men ; sometimes, again, I think there is an abstract reason for it, and there is something more substantive about a woman than ever there can be about a man. I can conceive a great mythical woman, living alone among inaccessible mountain-tops or in some lost island in the pagan seas, and ask no more. Whereas if I hear of a Hercules, I ask after Iole or Dejanira. I cannot think him a man without women. But I can think of these three deep-breasted women, living out all their days on remote hilltops, seeing the white dawn and the purple even, and the world outspread before them for ever, and no more to them for ever than a sight of the eyes, a hearing of the ears, a far-away interest of the inflexible heart, not pausing, not pitying, but austere with a holy austerity, rigid with a calm and passionless rigidity ; and I find them none the less women to the end.

And think, if one could love a woman like that once, see her once grow pale with passion, and once wring your lips out upon hers, would it not be a small thing to die ? Not that there is not a passion of a quite other sort, much less epic, far more dramatic and intimate, that comes out of the very frailty of perishable women ; out of the lines of suffering that we see written about their eyes, and that we may wipe out if it were but for a moment ; out of the thin hands, wrought and tempered in agony to a fineness of perception, that the indifferent or the merely happy cannot know ; out of the tragedy that lies about such a love, and the pathetic incompleteness. This is another thing, and perhaps it is a higher. I look over my shoulder at the three great headless Madonnas, and they look back at me and do

not move ; see me, and through and over me, the foul life of the city dying to its embers already as the night draws on ; and over miles and miles of silent country, set here and there with lit towns, thundered through here and there with night expresses scattering fire and smoke ; and away to the ends of the earth, and the furthest star, and the blank regions of nothing ; and they are not moved. My quiet, great-kneed, deep-breasted, well-draped ladies of Necessity, I give my heart to you !

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, late Autumn*, 1874], *Saturday*

I am not going to excuse myself formally for my long silence, the excuse for one day will come out incidentally.

I was so glad to get your letter, in spite of bad news. It is strange to think of you so feeble and with all these troubles about you ; and then to think of your just holding me by one hand out of the gulph, which, alas ! is true. I know that very well ; as the effect of my last stay with you died away, and the cold weather came, I have had a bad struggle with myself day by day, and night by night. Opium and wine, and anything that is death for soul and body tempt me one after another ; and in bed at night (I am always feverish and seedy and in a certain gloomy state of lightheadedness at night) I often make up my mind that to-morrow I shall begin to descend to the mouth of the pit ; but on the morrow, thank God, I manage to give myself a turn the other way, and keep as straight as can be expected. O don't let go my hand.

I shall (if I can manage my parents, to whom I have not yet spoken in the matter) arrive at King's Cross on Wednesday evening. Is there a hotel at King's Cross ? I shall come to the College for you, shall I not ?

Then—you must know that this last week I have lost a front tooth. The dentist and I were an hour over it, and then, although it was not all out even then, he was afraid to do more in case he made me ill. I really suffered

wonderfully little ; but an hour of such suspense is not agreeable ; and besides, I did not want to lose a front tooth. Don't be surprised at this being a letter in a bad humour ; I have had a cold hanging over me for a fortnight ; and my work is worth nothing ; so all that usually keeps me steady is gone. Three weeks of skating weather —or a visit to you, *voilà mes seules espérances*.

Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO MRS. SITWELL

[*Edinburgh, December*, 1874], *Tuesday*

FIFTEEN degrees of frost last night and half an hour ago (10.30) ten degrees in the thermometer at our drawing-room window ; such a ringing jolly morning. I had to cover my nose and mouth as I went up to College this morning. The air caught in my nose so shrewdly and *tasted* of frost—that sick, heavy, cold *taste* of frost—so badly after it was down. Isn't it good of me to come home and work ? But I'm away immediately to skate.

*Wednesday*.—Work, I cannot—I have been all morning almost without avail, however, that will come in good time. Thank you, my dear lady, for your letter : O, yes, God knows every word of it knocked at my heart, and I will try to be what you would have me ; and I do feel the ground stable under my feet as I have never felt it heretofore.

I have been so happy all afternoon skating. It made up for my wasted morning trying to work, and your sweet letter crowned all.

*Friday*.—I have made myself so ill with a story of Poe's—" King's Pest " by name—I did not sleep last night, and have scarcely been able to eat to-day. However, I have spoken to my mother, not altogether with bad result, I hope, and I am trying in other ways to order my life properly. This will not get to you till Monday at soonest—write soon to me when you get it, if you can. Madonna, I

am so glad you are in the world, and I do want to be reminded of it often.

I am sorely exercised about my poor cousin—the married girl—I have had a very distressing letter from her, praying for some immediate work that should remunerate—you can't tell (so she writes) you can't tell the difference it would make! Surely if there is one thing pure and lovely and of good report it is to find women work. I think I shall manage for her; but not without throwing a good deal on myself. I am going to take service with a daily paper here; I shall read the books and make my own notes, and then send them on to her; she can then write what she will, I can always straighten it up when it comes back. Good night, Madonna—I pray all my Gods for you fervently, and if they are impotent, they are yet beautiful—look at them, and you will be good and brave.

*Saturday*.—I did not know whether yesterday's scrawl were legible or no; but, on revision, I think it is. The frost still holds with us, which is good for my health and my morals. When you write you must tell me how you are, and faithfully.

I am very busy with Poe for the *Academy*, and a big piece of work I find it, even in the loose, slipshod, easy-going way in which one takes things for the *Academy*. As soon as I have done, I shall begin on my "Pastoral Drama" business; I have so many nice things to say about "Midsummer Night's Dream," and I am so fearful lest Pater should get before me with some or all of them that I feel there is no time to be lost. I do not know how much I wish to be with you, and am afraid to think; I look on all the interval as preparation for the next visit; remember how I hold to your skirts—remember it always. I am very happy and, if not full of work, still with a working heart. Work I must soon, for I shall have, it seems, to work for two; that will be good for me, will it not? Good night.

Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

Stevenson's review of Poe's works as edited in seven

volumes by J. H. Ingram appeared in *The Academy* for January 2, 1875; the "Pastoral Drama" essay, so far as I can recollect or ascertain, never got written.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh*], *December* 23, 1874

*Monday*.—I have come from a concert, and the concert was rather a disappointment. Not so my afternoon skating—Duddingston, our big loch, is bearing; and I wish you could have seen it this afternoon covered with people in thin driving snow flurries, the big hill grim and white and alpine overhead in the thick air, and the road up the gorge, as it were into the heart of it, dotted black with traffic. Moreover, I *can* skate a little bit; and what one can do is always pleasant to do.

*Tuesday*.—I got your letter to-day, and was so glad thereof. It was of good omen to me also. I worked from ten to one (my classes are suspended now for Xmas holidays), and wrote four or five *Portfolio* pages of my Buckinghamshire affair. Then I went to Duddingston, and skated all afternoon. If you had seen the moon rising, a perfect sphere of smoky gold, in the dark air above the trees, and the white loch thick with skaters, and the great hill, snow-sprinkled, overhead! It was a sight for a king.

*Wednesday*.—I stayed on Duddingston to-day till after nightfall. The little booths that hucksters set up round the edge were marked each one by its little lamp. There were some fires too; and the light, and the shadows of the people who stood round them to warm themselves, made a strange pattern all round on the snow-covered ice. A few people with torches began to travel up and down the ice, a lit circle travelling along with them over the snow. A gigantic moon rose, meanwhile, over the trees and the kirk on the promontory, among perturbed and vacillating clouds.

The walk home was very solemn and strange. Once, through a broken gorge, we had a glimpse of a little space

of mackerel sky, moon-litten, on the other side of the hill; the broken ridges standing grey and spectral between; and the hill-top over all, snow-white, and strangely magnified in size.

This must go to you to-morrow, so that you may read it on Christmas Day for company. I hope it may be good company to you.

*Thursday*.—Outside, it snows thick and steadily. The gardens before our house are now a wonderful fairy forest. And O, this whiteness of things, how I love it, how it sends the blood about my body! Maurice de Guérin hated snow; what a fool he must have been! Somebody tried to put me out of conceit with it by saying that people were lost in it. As if people don't get lost in love, too, and die of devotion to art; as if everything worth were not an occasion to some people's end.

What a wintry letter this is! Only I think it is winter seen from the inside of a warm greatcoat. And there is, at least, a warm heart about it somewhere. Do you know, what they say in Xmas stories is true. I think one loves their friends more dearly at this season.—Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The book mentioned in the following is *A Quiet Corner of England*, a description of scenery and architecture in the region of Rye, Winchelsea, and the Romney Marsh by Stevenson's friend and mine, Basil Champneys, since highly distinguished as the designer of Bedford College in the Regent's Park, as well as of many important academical buildings at Cambridge and Oxford, at Harrow, Winchester, and King's Lynn; also as author of memoirs of Coventry Patmore, Henry Merritt, and Mrs. L. Drummond. Stevenson had himself reviewed the *Quiet Corner of England* in *The Academy* for December 5.

[*Edinburgh, December* 28, 1874]

MADONNA, this will not likely have much in it—this sheet—when it goes to you. My people are both ill, my father in a miserable state of depression and nervousness.

*Sunday*.—My people are, for the moment, better, but I suspect I have been right about my father, and that he is really not well. He has jaundice, but jaundice (so I understand) is a symptom only; what it means in my father's case, I fear to think—I fear some of the family ailments.

Colvin's article on Champneys' book is very wise, but I think he went too far in admitting that the sensations given us by the alps were, in themselves, greater than those given by the Romney Marsh. I don't think so. A great dead flat is at least a more ideal, more perfect, more satisfactory thing than ever so high a hill; because the hill might be ever so much higher, whereas the marsh can be no flatter if it burst itself. Besides, big hills may be more of a sensation to a person brought up in Suffolk; but, if novelty is to come in at all, quite a flat is a violent sensation to me; for I come from the hills—I had not seen anything quite flat, except the sea and here and there a billiard table, until I went abroad and spent some days in Holland. Please communicate this to Colvin, unless he has quarrelled with me by chance—he studiously will not answer my letters. I have been a bad correspondent, but he has been so much a *badder!* Indeed, if you won't think me getting insane, I think the world in a conspiracy against me; for devil a one will write to me except yourself. Even Bob sends me scraps only fit to light a pipe with.

At last I can write; I could not make a mark on this paper with a steel pen, and you do not know with how much sweat of the brow my former letters were written. Now I have taken to a quill, all goes well.

I was a long walk to-day; the white snow over all, and I love the look of the white snow; the brightness of it slips in between your eyelids, when you are thinking of it least, and makes your mind bright. I want to know how you are badly. I say, you have much need to take care of yourself, if it were only for the sake of a young gentleman in Edinburgh alone—you don't know how the thought of anything going wrong with you haunts and disquiets me.

*Monday*.—I am so frightened. I thought you would have answered the letter I sent you for Christmas; and

now, three days and no answer seems too much. I feel strangely as if all my letters were being suppressed. Colvin never answers, Appleton never answers, or so much as acknowledges copy; and now you! *Vraiment, je suis inquiet;* I figure to myself always so many things when you do not write.

Also my father is plainly in a bad way; that's the short and long of that, I am afraid.

*Later.*—Your letter has come by a late post. My father, too, according to the doctor's account, is better and there is no fear of anything permanent or organic. So that I may be happy, and am. There was never a more sudden change in anyone's humour, than in mine when your letter came; and you will not be angry with me though I tell you it was all for pleasure. I had imagined so much in a dull unacknowledged way and had so many alternatives of distress ready, that your news seemed to me positively cheerful.

*Tuesday.*—I am so tired, I cannot write. I have nearly finished the story of which I wrote to you: it is not nearly so good as *King Matthias*; that is to say it is not so simple, straightforward and uniform in colour; it has, however, many more elements, and is much longer.

*Wednesday.*—I want to send this off; and as I have determined to do no work to-day, I may manage it. I overworked shamefully yesterday, and was really played out in the afternoon. I wrote from nine to 12.30, and then from one to 2.45. It is such a temptation to get on while one is in the humour. The worst of this story, as a story, is, perhaps, the idyll at the beginning, continued and finished at the end, after the long, *baroque*, wicked interlude of the story proper; but I don't know—that may be just the best of it; it is so difficult to judge when one is in the thick of it; and the two bits are nice, I think, simple and really pleasant. You shall see.

Dear, I am wonderfully happy. Pleased with my work, not disquiet about you; I must never disquiet myself about you any more; you will have strength for all that comes, after you have found strength for what has come.

Then again, I have nice books to read. The new French

poets. Sully Prudhomme is adorable—I shall have a lot of Sully Prudhomme to read when I come to you—Soulary better perhaps—better certainly, *comme forme*, but so unsympathetic compared to Prudhomme in character and thought.

I am so sick of the mechanical exercise of writing—you can't think ! and my right thumb-nail is quite flattened. I have written four and half or five hours the last four days. And it is too much. Good-bye.

Your son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

In these closing weeks of 1874 Stevenson was for a while rendered deeply anxious by the state of his father's health both of mind and body, a state which fortunately proved only temporary. After some sentences setting forth fully the symptoms which caused him this anxiety, as well as some consequent resolutions concerning his future management of his own life, he continues:

[*Edinburgh, December* 29, 1874], *Tuesday*

ANOTHER, though a much smaller disappointment to me, is that I have finally bade adieu to inheriting any money. I must learn to live by my own pen or something. I promised my father (as I think it was entirely his right, and mind you, it was on no prompting from him, nor has he any notion how serious the words were for me) that I shall never use a farthing of his money unless I am a Christian. He was talking of the duty of leaving money to children ; and then he said, " Of course there were certain conditions that superseded the call of blood ; for instance, did he think he had a son who thought as Tyndall thought, he could not leave his money to him ; he was not possessor of it to so great an extent ; he only held it in trust for the views in which he believed." So I said to him that I should reckon any person a thief who would use another's money in such circumstance. And he said fervently, " And a damned thief, too." He was quite quiet and

sensible ; indeed it is the sense of his whole life ; and for me it will, of course, supersede the terms of any will written in ignorance, doubt, or misapprehension—I should have said, " In ignorance, misapprehension, or *even doubt*."

It is too bad of me to talk of these little matters at such a time, but they had to be said, for they were weighing on me, I shall not construe this promise too tightly. I shall not let myself starve, of course ; but beyond that must try to be an honest man. As for how things are to go on here, until he recovers, I don't know ; I hope he may recover speedily, and so the doctor seems to hope. In any case, he is a very painful invalid.

*Wednesday*.—S. C. writes to me and talks of thaw ; for my part I have seen none of it. The night before last the thermometer stood at 12 degrees ; last night it read at least as low as 22 degrees on the front of our house ; to-day it has been freezing all day, and snowing at intervals. I have been skating every day, and improving, but not so much as I could wish, in that adorable art.

My father is better, I thank God, and there have been no such miserable scenes as yesterday. My moral disinheritance has quickened me for work again, and I have gone forward a great piece in my Wendover article ; it is now nearly done, and should be about a dozen pages I imagine ; I keep well, this frost enduring ; I have good, bright exercise, and a taste, after it, for slumber.

*Thursday*.—I must post this so that it may meet you for the new year's morning. I hope that will not be baffled, like my Christmas letter. By the by, if I am to do a paper that S. C. suggests—and I think I will—I should like any letter of mine in which I say anything about winter, snow, ice, Duddingston, or even sunsets, to give a look over ; I shall see if I want them, or not ; I hope I may do without them ; but you see my letters to you are the only notes I make, and especially when I am skating my mind runs miles away from literary intentions, so that my impressions are rather fragmentary to work upon.

Did you get a letter I sent you in Paris ?

In spite of this new sorrow, I may still greet the New Year, may I not ?

Ever your faithful,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The *Portfolio* article here mentioned is *An Autumn Effect* (see *Essays of Travel*). The Italian story so delightedly begun was by and by condemned and destroyed like all the others of this time.

[*Edinburgh, January*, 1875], *Monday*

HAVE come from a concert. Sinico sang, *tant bien que mal*, " Ah perfido spergiuro ! " ; and then we had the Eroica symphony (No. 3). I can, and need, say no more ; I am rapt out of earth by it ; Beethoven is certainly the greatest man the world has yet produced. I wonder, is there anything so superb—I can find no word for it more specific than superb—all I know is that all my knowledge is transcended. I finished to-day and sent off (and a mighty mean detail it is, to set down after Beethoven's grand passion) my *Portfolio* article about Buckinghamshire. In its own way I believe it to be a good thing ; and I hope you will find something in it to like ; it touches, in a dry enough manner, upon most things under heaven, and if you like me, I think you ought to like this intellectual—no, I withdraw the word—this artistic dog of mine. Thaw—thaw—thaw, up here ; and farewell skating, and farewell the clear dry air and the wide, bright, white snow-surface, and all that was so pleasant in the past.

*Wednesday*.—Yesterday I wasn't well and to-night I have been ever so busy. There came a note from the *Academy*, sent by John H. Ingram, the editor of the edition of Poe's works I have been reviewing, challenging me to find any more faults. I have found nearly sixty ; so I may be happy ; but that makes me none the less sleepy ; so I must go to bed.

*Friday*.—I am awfully out of the humour to write ; I am very inert although quite happy ; I am informed by

those who are more expert that I am bilious. *Bien ;* let it be so ; I am still content ; and though I can do no original work, I get forward making notes for my *Knox* at a good trot.

*Saturday.*—I am so happy. I am no longer here in Edinburgh. I have been all yesterday evening and this forenoon in Italy, four hundred years ago, with one Sannazzaro, sculptor, painter, poet, etc., and one Ippolita, a beautiful Duchess. O I like it badly ! I wish you could hear it at once ; or rather I wish you could see it immediately in beautiful type on such a page as it ought to be, in my first little volume of stories. What a change this is from collecting dull notes for *John Knox*, as I have been all the early part of the week—the difference between life and death.—I am quite well again and in such happy spirits, as who would not be, having spent so much of his time at that convent on the hills with these sweet people. *Vous verrez*, and if you don't like this story—well, I give it up if you don't like it. Not but what there's a long way to travel yet ; I am no farther than the threshold ; I have only set the men, and the game has still to be played, and a lot of dim notions must become definite and shapely, and a deal be clear to me that is anything but clear as yet. The story shall be called, I think, *When the Devil was well*, in allusion to the old proverb.

Good-bye.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO SIDNEY COLVIN

17 *Heriot Row, Edinburgh* [*January*, 1875]

MY DEAR COLVIN,—I have worked too hard ; I have given myself one day of rest, and that was not enough : so I am giving myself another. I shall go to bed again likewise so soon as this is done, and slumber most potently.

9 P.M.—Slept all afternoon like a lamb.

About my coming south, I think the still small unanswerable voice of coins will make it impossible until the session

is over (end of March); but for all that, I think I shall hold out jolly. I do not want you to come and bother yourself; indeed, it is still not quite certain whether my father will be quite fit for you, although I have now no fear of that really. Now don't take up this wrongly; I wish you could come; and I do not know anything that would make me happier, but I see that it is wrong to expect it, and so I resign myself: some time after. I offered Appleton a series of papers on the modern French school—the Parnassiens, I think they call them—de Banville, Coppée, Soulary, and Sully Prudhomme. But he has not deigned to answer my letter.

I shall have another *Portfolio* paper so soon as I am done with this story, that has played me out; the story is to be called *When the Devil was well:* scene, Italy, Renaissance; colour, purely imaginary of course, my own unregenerate idea of what Italy then was. O, when shall I find the story of my dreams, that shall never halt nor wander nor step aside, but go ever before its face, and ever swifter and louder, until the pit receives it, roaring? The *Portfolio* paper will be about Scotland and England.—Ever yours,

R. L. STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, January,* 1875]

I WISH I could write better letters to you. Mine must be very dull. I must try to give you news. Well, I was at the annual dinner of my old Academy schoolfellows last night. We sat down ten, out of seventy-two! The others are scattered all over the places of the earth, some in San Francisco, some in New Zealand, some in India, one in the backwoods—it gave one a wide look over the world to hear them talk so. I read them some verses. It is great fun; I always read verses, and in the vinous enthusiasm of the moment they always propose to have them printed; *Ce qui n'arrive jamais du reste:* in the morning, they are more calm.

*Sunday*.—It occurs to me that one reason why there is no news in my letters is because there is so little in my life. I always tell you of my concerts ; I was at another yesterday afternoon : a recital of Hallé and Norman Neruda. I went in the evening to the pantomime with the Mackintoshes—cousins of mine. Their little boy, aged four, was there for the first time. To see him with his eyes fixed and open like saucers, and never varying his expression save in so far as he might sometimes open his mouth a little wider, was worth the money. He laughed only once—when the giant's dwarf fed his master as though he were a child. Coming home, he was much interested as to who made the fairies, and wanted to know if they were like *berries*. I should like to know how much this question was due to the idea of their coming up from under the stage, and how much to a vague idea of rhyme. When he was told that they were not like berries, he then asked if they had not been flowers before they were fairies. It was a good deal in the vein of Herbert Spencer's primitive man all this.

I am pretty well but have not got back to work much since Tuesday. I worked far too hard at the story ; but I wish I had finished it before I stopped as I feel somewhat out of the swing now.—Ever your faithful,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Sidney Colvin

Another of the literary projects which came to naught, no one of the stories mentioned having turned out according to Stevenson's dream and desire at its first conception, or even having been preserved for use afterwards as the foundation of riper work. "Clytie" is of course the famous Roman bust from the Townley collection in the British Museum.

[*Edinburgh, January, Monday*, 1875]

MY DEAR COLVIN,—Thanks for your letter, I too am in such a state of business that I know not when to find the time to write. Look here—Seeley does not seem to me to have put that paper of mine in this month ; so I remain

unable to pay you ; which is a sad pity and must be forgiven me.

What am I doing ? Well I wrote my second *John Knox*, which is not a bad piece of work for me ; begun and finished ready for press in nine days. Then I have since written a story called *King Matthias's Hunting Horn*, and I am engaged in finishing another called *The Two Falconers of Cairnstane*. I find my stories affect me rather more perhaps than is wholesome. I have only been two hours at work to-day, and yet I have been crying and am shaking badly, as you can see in my handwriting, and my back is a bit bad. They give me pleasure though, quite worth all results. However I shall work no more to-day.

I am to get £1000 when I pass Advocate, it seems ; which is good.

O I say, will you kindly tell me all about the bust of Clytie.

---

Then I had the wisdom to stop and look over Japanese picture books until lunch time.

Well, tell me about Clytie, how old is it, who did it, what's it about, etc. Send it on a sheet that I can forward without indiscretion to another, as I desire the information for a friend whom I wish to please.

Now look here. When I have twelve stories ready—these twelve—

All Scotch.

I. The Devil on Cramond Sands (needs copying about half).
II. The Curate of Anstruther's Bottle (needs copying altogether).
III. The Two Falconers of Cairnstane (wants a few pages).
IV. Strange Adventures of Mr. Nehemiah Solny (wants reorganisation).
V. King Matthias's Hunting Horn (all ready).
VI. Autolycus at Court (in gremio).
VII. The Family of Love (in gremio).
VIII. The Barrel Organ (all ready).

IX. The Last Sinner (wants copying).
X. Margery Bonthron (wants a few pages).
XI. Martin's Madonna (in gremio).
XII. Life and Death (all ready).

—when I have these twelve ready, should I not do better to try to get a publisher for them, call them *A Book of Stories* and put a dedicatory letter at the fore end of them. I should get less coin than by going into magazines perhaps ; but I should also get more notice, should I not ? and so, do better for myself in the long run. Now, should I not ? Besides a book with boards is a book with boards, even if it bain't a very fat one and has no references to Ammianus Marcellinus and the German critics at the foot of the pages. On all this, I shall want your serious advice. I am sure I shall stand or fall by the stories ; and you'll think so too, when you see those poor excrescences the two John Knox and Women games. However, judge for yourself and be prudent on my behalf, like a good soul.

Yes, I'll come to Cambridge then or thereabout, if God doesn't put a real tangible spoke in my wheel.

My terms with my parents are admirable ; we are a very united family.

Good-bye, *mon cher*, *je ne puis plus écrire*. I have not quite got over a damned affecting part in my story this morning. O cussed stories, they will never affect any one but me I fear.—Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, February*, 1875], *Sunday*

I HAVE been busy and knocked about and found no time to write. How the weather changes. On Friday I went to Bridge of Allan. A beautiful clear sunny winter's day, all the highland hills standing about the horizon in their white robes. It was not cold. I went up my favourite walk by the riverside among the pines and ash-trees. There

is a little cavern here, by the side of a wide meadow, which has been a part of me any time these last twelve years—or more. On Friday it was wonderful. A large broken branch hung down over the mouth of it, and it was all cased in perfect ice. Every dock-leaf and long grass, too, was bearded with a shining icicle. And all the icicles kept dropping, and dropping and dropping, and had made another little forest of clear ice among the grasses and fallen branches and dockens below them. I picked up one of these branches and threw it on the ground ; and all the crystal broke with a little tinkle, and behold ! a damp stick.

Yesterday, a thick fog, rain, and then snow, and then rain ; and all along the roads the snow lay melting, and the pools froze and thawed alternately. And now to-day, a big blustering west wind and splendid sunshine, darkened ever and again by clouds and angry squalls of rain.

I am all right again, I think, though still taking eleven to twelve hours sleep per night. And I am quite strong and virtuous again, and determined to take no more money from my parents. It's all nonsense, it should be enough and shall.

My father also is better and quite like himself again, of which I am very glad.

Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

In the following is related Stevenson's first introduction to W. E. Henley. The acquaintance thus formed ripened quickly, as is well known, into what was for some years a close and stimulating friendship. Of the story called *A Country Dance* no trace remains.

*Edinburgh, Tuesday* [*February*, 1875]

I GOT your nice long gossiping letter to-day—I mean by that that there was more news in it than usual—and so, of course, I am pretty jolly. I am in the house, however, with such a beastly cold in the head. Our east winds begin already to be very cold.

O, I have such a longing for children of my own ; and yet I do not think I could bear it if I had one. I fancy I must feel more like a woman than like a man about that. I sometimes hate the children I see on the street—you know what I mean by hate—wish they were somewhere else, and not there to mock me ; and sometimes, again, I don't know how to go by them for the love of them, especially the very wee ones.

*Thursday.*—I have been still in the house since I wrote, and I *have* worked. I finished the Italian story ; not well, but as well as I can just now ; I must go all over it again, some time soon, when I feel in the humour to better and perfect it. And now I have taken up an old story, begun years ago ; and I have now re-written all I had written of it then, and mean to finish it. What I have lost and gained is odd. As far as regards simple writing, of course, I am in another world now ; but in some things, though more clumsy, I seem to have been freer and more plucky : this is a lesson I have taken to heart. I have got a jolly new name for my old story. I am going to call it *A Country Dance ;* the two heroes heep changing places, you know ; and the chapter where the most of this changing goes on is to be called " Up the middle, down the middle." It will be in six or (perhaps) seven chapters. I have never worked harder in my life than these last four days. If I can only keep it up.

*Saturday.*—Yesterday, Leslie Stephen, who was down here to lecture, called on me and took me up to see a poor fellow, a sort of poet who writes for him, and who has been eighteen months in our infirmary, and may be, for all I know, eighteen months more. It was very sad to see him there in a little room with two beds, and a couple of sick children in the other bed ; a girl came in to visit the children, and played dominoes on the counterpane with them ; the gas flared and crackled, the fire burned in a dull economical way ; Stephen and I sat on a couple of chairs, and the poor fellow sat up in his bed with his hair and beard all tangled, and talked as cheerfully as if he had been in a King's palace, or the great King's palace of the blue air.

He has taught himself two languages since he has been lying there. I shall try to be of use to him.

We have had two beautiful spring days, mild as milk, windy withal, and the sun hot. I dreamed last night I was walking by moonlight round the place where the scene of my story is laid; it was all so quiet and sweet, and the blackbirds were singing as if it was day; it made my heart very cool and happy.—Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To SIDNEY COLVIN

[*Edinburgh*], *February* 8, 1875

MY DEAR COLVIN,—Forgive my bothering you. Here is the proof of my second *Knox*. Glance it over, like a good fellow, and if there's anything very flagrant send it to me marked. I have no confidence in myself; I feel such an ass. What have I been doing? As near as I can calculate, nothing. And yet I have worked all this month from three to five hours a day, that is to say, from one to three hours more than my doctor allows me; positively no result.

No, I can write no article just now; I am *pioching*, like a madman, at my stories, and can make nothing of them; my simplicity is tame and dull—my passion tinsel, boyish, hysterical. Never mind—ten years hence, if I live, I shall have learned, so help me God. I know one must work, in the meantime (so says Balzac) *comme le mineur enfoui sous un éboulement*.

*J'y parviendrai, nom de nom de nom!* But it's a long look forward.—Ever yours,

R. L. S.

### To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh*, 1875], *Monday*

Dearest Mother,—This is E. A. Poe :—

Because I feel that, in the heavens above,
The angels, whispering to one another,
Can find, among their terms of burning love,
None so devotional as that of " Mother " ;
Therefore by that dear name I long have called you,
You who are *more than mother unto me,*
*And fill my heart of hearts.*

I do not know to whom it was that I wrote last spring, when I was at the bottom of sorrow at Mentone—but I think it was to Bob ; if it was not to him it was to you—calling for a mother ; I felt so lonely just then ; I cannot tell you what sense of desertion and loss I had in my heart ; and I wrote, I remember, to someone, crying out for the want of a mother—nay, when I fainted one afternoon at the Villa Marina, and the first sound I heard was Madame Garschine saying " Berecchino " so softly, I was glad—O, so glad !—to take her by the hand as a mother, and make a mother of her at the time, so far as it would go. You do not know, perhaps—I do not think I knew myself, perhaps, until I thought it out to-day—how dear a hope, how sorry a want, this has been for me. For my mother is my father's wife ; to have a French mother, there must be a French marriage ; the children of lovers are orphans. I am very young at heart—or (God knows) very old—and what I want is a mother, and I have one now, have I not ?

### To Mrs. Sitwell

[17 *Heriot Row, Edinburgh, March*, 1875], *Wednesday*

Dearest Mother,—I am all right again, I think, and write to tell you so at once. Forgive me if I write no more. I am reading " The Village on the Cliff," and cannot tell you how beautiful I think it. I am inclined to give up

literature. I can't write like that. Never mind, *je serai fidèle*.

Goodbye, dear,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, March*, 1875]

THE best trumpet that I can suggest is to read Thomas Carlyle's Essay on Burns. Sick as I am of reading anything in which so much as the name of Burns appears, I was really electrified (beg pardon for such a *Daily Telegraphism*) by this. It is full of very fine criticism, expressed here and there in rather an old-fashioned, academical style, full of beautiful humanity—see the whole passage about Burns having refused money for his songs—and full of wonderful wisdom. The whole conclusion is indeed admirable; as where he says that all fame, riches, fortune of all sorts is to true peace no more than "mounting to the house top to reach the stars"; and again about Byron: "the fire that was in him was the mad fire of a volcano; and now we look sadly into the ashes of a crater which ere long will fill itself with snow."

I subscribe to that essay. My own is quite unnecessary. Do read it, it will do you good; it would do the dead good. It has reminded me once again of the great mistake of my life—and of everybody else's; that we are all trying to gain the whole world if you will, except what alone is worth keeping; our own soul. God bless T. Carlyle, say I.

The weather here still keeps up to a very high degree of excellence; it is as cold as winter, and rains every afternoon. In my room here my hands are very numb and the skin is stiff across my forehead.

Read that Essay, it is in Volume Two, and keep up your heart, Madonna. For myself, I am in a thrill of religion, but too cold, and too much soddened with much making of notes, to let any of my religion out in very inspiring correspondence, I'm afraid.

My news is all good, I think. Capital health, capital with parents, capital humour for work.

. . . Ever your faithful friend,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[17 *Heriot Row, Edinburgh, March,* 1875], *Tuesday*

COLD—cold as winter. It has snowed half the day, and the streets this evening are as glass. I have made no progress with my story these last three days; in the way of writing at least; in comprehension, I made lots, and found out all my old errors, which has perhaps been better progress than mere writing; you cannot fancy how I desire—*comment je m'acharne*—to finish it before I come south to you. You will not like it, but you may perhaps not think it quite bad; anyway, I want your sympathy or your condemnation. I do think one of my characters you will think true and likeable, in its own dry, provincial way.

*Wednesday.*—God bless you for your letter. I will try to get down about the 15th; sooner is impossible; that, even is not much above a hope; but I'll manage it, by Gad. Sooner cannot be—will that do? O how I want to see you. No work to-day to speak of. A cursed spell upon me; and how the days go by and go by, and I have accomplished nothing. Courage, my heart, It shall be, somehow; I must get near you. I ought to write in verse to-night; that is to say, I cannot write in prose; and that, most people mean by writing verse. It has snowed all day and blown out of the East. It was so cold and wild. All that promise of spring is away. It was a lie, a deceit; and we are back in winter.

I wonder what this spell is; and I scarcely know whether to struggle with it or not; it is a sort of heaviness of hand and brain; nothing will come right when I am thus, although I never see clearer what is right.

*Thursday.*—Your son is very sad to-night, dear, very cold in body and black at heart. The snow lies melting outside

under a thin north-easterly rain. It is bitter cold; and the thickest shoes are wet through in the length of a street. I have done no work to-day—it would not come; and I have been so sad; so sad, and longed for a sight of you, and a few moments of speech with you, more than I can say. Did I tell you—yes, I did, I remember—how I thought I saw you in the street? Do you know I wish so much to meet you by chance somewhere; and I keep telling myself I shall see you at the next corner, and making long stories as a child does; only you never come.

*Sunday.*—I could not post this to-day, dear madonna, for I have been in the house with another cold. The weather is just the same; the town still sordid with patches of dirty snow, the bitter grey east wind still blowing over the sea against us and making a faint moaning even now in the chimney. It is horrible weather indeed, and weighs upon my power of work like lead. Indeed, my vitality is very low in every way; although I am not at all ill—all I want is a little warmth, a little sun, a little of the life I have when I am by you.

The story drags and goes slowly indeed; there will be little of it done after all when I get south; but it does go for all that; I do get it better as I work at it, I believe almost. I send you mine. Yes, by Gad, I'd like to see you. But here I am, with a book that has taken to boring me, rain and wind outside, a headache, and a sofa on which I must keep lying. *Tiens—pauvre bête.*

## To Mrs. Sitwell

As the spring advanced Stevenson had again been much out of sorts, and had gone for a change, in the company of his cousin R. A. M. Stevenson, on his first visit to the artist haunts of Fontainebleau which were afterwards so much endeared to him.

[*Barbizon, April,* 1875]

My dear Friend,—This is just a line to say I am well and happy. I am here in my dear forest all day in the open air. It is very be—no, not beautiful exactly, just now, but

very bright and living. There are one or two song birds and a cuckoo; all the fruit-trees are in flower, and the beeches make sunshine in a shady place. I begin to go all right; you need not be vexed about my health; I really was ill at first, as bad as I have been for nearly a year; but the forest begins to work, and the air, and the sun, and the smell of the pines. If I could stay a month here, I should be as right as possible. Thanks for your letter.—Your faithful

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Swanston, Tuesday, April,* 1875]

My dear Friend,—I have been so busy, away to Bridge of Allan with my father first, and then with Simpson and Baxter out here from Saturday till Monday. I had no time to write, and, as it is, am strangely incapable. Thanks for your letter. I have been reading such lots of law, and it seems to take away the power of writing from me. From morning to night, so often as I have a spare moment, I am in the embrace of a law book—barren embraces. I am in good spirits; and my heart smites me as usual, when I am in good spirits, about my parents. If I get a bit dull, I am away to London without a scruple; but so long as my heart keeps up, I am all for my parents.

What do you think of Henley's hospital verses? * They were to have been dedicated to me, but Stephen wouldn't allow it—said it would be pretentious.

*Wednesday.*—I meant to have made this quite a decent letter this morning, but listen. I had pain all last night, and did not sleep well, and now am cold and sickish, and strung up ever and again with another flash of pain. Will you remember me to everybody? My principal characteristics are cold, poverty, and Scots law—three very bad things. Oo, how the rain falls! The mist is quite low on the hill. The birds are twittering to each other about the indifferent season. O, here's a gem for you. An

* Printed by Mr. Leslie Stephen in the *Cornhill.*

old godly woman predicted the end of the world, because the seasons were becoming indistinguishable; my cousin Dora objected that last winter had been pretty well marked. "Yes, my dear," replied the soothsayeress; "but I think you'll find the summer will be rather coamplicated."—Ever your faithful

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, Spring,* 1875], *Friday*

Now I have a moment to write to you. I have been working every spare moment, and *obsédé* by two girls living in the house, on whom I was called to lavish attentions.

First, the Wagner Concert. Yes, it was a great success, and what do you think? Baxter said the very thing of him that you had said, to wit, that he was like Walt Whitman. Baxter and I go together to all the concerts that are going; however, we generally come and go with Beethoven—we have now added Wagner to the list; he is jolly and fresh, like a wind.

I have been in a curiously impressionable state; the sight of people and things has pursued me (spring, spring, I suppose). The other day, a little wee deformed girl, with that curious voice, neither boy's nor girl's nor man's nor woman's, but of sexless and ageless deformity; yesterday, two little children—such pretty children, who had been lost, and were being taken to the police station, the wee boy stoically eating scone on the policeman's shoulder, and the wee girl trotting unconcernedly at his side, with a great semicircle of scone, about as big as herself, in one hand, and the hem of the policeman's trouser in the other; a train that I saw going round the outside of our station (I was looking down from overhead on the Bridge) on a very curved line of rails—if you had seen the sinuous grace of it as it turned slowly from one curve on to another; lastly, a nice ugly girl who went by me smiling, and looking so happy, that I could not help smiling myself and was happy

for a great while after. These are some of the things that took hold of me. I don't like being so sensitive in town though, for the impressions are more often painful than agreeable. In the country now, it would be different.

*Saturday*.—I am idle to-day ; I had a little tic last night, but somehow I am better in spirits. I have thrown off the worst of my depression ; indeed this morning I can scarcely call myself depressed. I am a little *February*, that is all.

I am to act Orsino (The Duke) in Twelfth Night at the Jenkin's. I could not resist that ; it is such a delightful part ; and I got them to put off my rehearsals to the last moment ; so that I may get a fortnight with you in London and a fortnight with Bob in France ; for that must be done this time, *coûte que coûte*. I am not altogether satisfied that I shall do Orsino *comme il faut ;* but the Jenkins are pleased, and that is the great affair.

Colvin says he does not know what I have been doing. Well, I don't know myself. I seem to waste my time sadly, and yet I do try to work, I think you know that.

O—I must tell you a nice thing about my mother ; when I was in low spirits about my work to-day, she came up quite suddenly and kissed me. I think this shows we are on good terms, does it not ?

*Sunday*.—What to say, I do not know. It rains, the bells ring clamorously for church ; and as they ring, all the weary Sundays of my childhood go in a procession through my heart. O, the ennui, the ennui, the ennui of it all !

Never mind, I will work and keep brave and happy, till the time comes.

Ever your loving son,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To MRS. SITWELL

[*Edinburgh, April*, 1875], *Saturday*

I AM getting on with my rehearsals, but I find the part very hard. I rehearsed yesterday from a quarter to seven,

and to-day from four (with interval for dinner) to eleven. You see the sad strait I am in for ink.—*À demain.*

*Sunday.*—This is the third ink-bottle I have tried, and still it's nothing to boast of. My journey went off all right, and I have kept ever in good spirits. Last night, indeed, I did think my little bit of gaiety was going away down the wind like a whiff of tobacco smoke, but to-day it has come back to me a little. The influence of this place is assuredly all that can be worst against one ; *mais il faut lutter.* I was haunted last night when I was in bed by the most cold, desolate recollections of my past life here ; I was glad to try and think of the forest, and warm my hands at the thought of it. O the quiet, grey thickets, and the yellow butterflies, and the woodpeckers, and the outlook over the plain as it were over a sea ! O for the good, fleshly stupidity of the woods, the body conscious of itself all over and the mind forgotten, the clean air nestling next your skin as though your clothes were gossamer, the eye filled and content, the whole MAN HAPPY ! Whereas here it takes a pull to hold yourself together ; it needs both hands, and a book of stoical maxims, and a sort of bitterness at the heart by way of armour.—Ever your faithful

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, April,* 1875] *Wednesday*

I AM so played out with a cold in my eye that I cannot see to write or read without difficulty. It is swollen *horrible ;* so how I shall look as Orsino. God knows ! I have my fine clothes tho'. Henley's sonnets have been taken for the *Cornhill.* He is out of hospital now, and dressed, but still not too much to brag of in health, poor fellow, I am afraid.

*Sunday.*—So. I have still rather bad eyes, and a nasty sore throat. I play Orsino every day, in all the pomp of Solomon, splendid Francis the First clothes, heavy with gold and stage jewellery. I play it ill enough, I believe ; but me and the clothes, and the wedding wherewith the

clothes and me are reconciled, produce every night a thrill of admiration. Our cook told my mother (there is a servants' night, you know) that she and the housemaid were "just prood to be able to say it was oor young gentleman." To sup afterwards with these clothes on, and a wonderful lot of gaiety and Shakespearean jokes about the table, is something to live for. It is so nice to feel you have been dead three hundred years, and the sound of your laughter is faint and far off in the centuries.—Ever your faithful

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, April,* 1875], *Wednesday*

A MOMENT at last. These last few days have been as jolly as days could be, and by good fortune I leave to-morrow for Swanston, so that I shall not feel the whole fall back to habitual self. The pride of life could scarce go further. To live in splendid clothes, velvet and gold and fur, upon principally champagne and lobster salad, with a company of people nearly all of whom are exceptionally good talkers; when your days began about eleven and ended about four—I have lost that sentence; I give it up; it is very admirable sport, any way. Then both my afternoons have been so pleasantly occupied—taking Henley drives. I had a business to carry him down the long stair, and more of a business to get him up again, but while he was in the carriage it was splendid. It is now just the top of spring with us. The whole country is mad with green. To see the cherry-blossom bitten out upon the black firs, and the black firs bitten out of the blue sky, was a sight to set before a king. You may imagine what it was to a man who has been eighteen months in an hospital ward. The look of his face was a wine to me. He plainly has been little in the country before. Imagine this: I always stopped him on the bridges to let him enjoy the great *cry* of green that goes up to Heaven out of the river

beds, and he asked (more than once) " What noise is that ? " —" The water."—" O ! " almost incredulously ; and then quite a long while after : " Do you know the noise of the water astonished me very much ? " I was much struck by his putting the question *twice ;* I have lost the sense of wonder of course ; but there must be something to wonder at, for Henley has eyes and ears and an immortal soul of his own.

I shall send this off to-day to let you know of my new address — Swanston Cottage, Lothianburn, Edinburgh. Salute the faithful in my name. Salute Priscilla, salute Barnabas, salute Ebenezer—O no, he's too much, I withdraw Ebenezer ; enough of early Christians.—Ever your faithful

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, Spring,* 1875], *Thursday*

WELL, my dear, at last. I have been working so hard, every day till yesterday, that I had no hand even to put down a word to you when I was done ; and yesterday I was seedy and afraid to write at all. I have finished the two first chapters now ; but before going farther, I have set to work to transcribe them yet again, because I am not quite sure of the characters. I can't tell you what a joy of battle I have in this work. Two days ago, when I read some pages over, and found them bad, I went out and had a walk for half an hour. I was not depressed ; I said " This is harder than I thought ; but I'll make it right or die." You know, if I could make it right, it would make such a difference, I could be so much more free, if once I had a position and could make money. And then, it's all work, of course. The amount of work I am doing takes the Springtime out of me a good bit, and I cannot give way to the unrest and delightful sadness of it, but what you say is true—every year it is sadder and gladder and more intense. Only this year I have given the giant a fall, and turned him to work, in irons, on my luckless story.

*Friday*.—I do not know if you are aware how much you help me in my work; it is not only that I have a strong motive; it is that I have always a woman to think of; and that is for so much.

I had *Adelaïde* sung to me to-night—a girl cousin living in the house—and it took me such a far journey into the past. There goes a quarter to twelve on the chimney clock on the stair; there is a faint moaning of wind without; and the night looks in at me, blue as a sapphire, through the window. There—there were two new noises; a railway whistle, and the roll of a cab in neighbouring streets.

## To Sidney Colvin

[*Edinburgh, Spring*, 1875]

I say, we have a splendid picture here in Edinburgh. A Ruysdael of which one can never tire; I think it is one of the best landscapes in the world; a grey still day, a grey still river, a rough oak wood on one shore, on the other chalky banks with very complicated footpaths, oak woods, a field where a man stands reaping, church towers relieved against the sky and a beautiful distance, neither blue nor green. It is so still, the light is so cool and temperate, the river woos you to bathe in it. O I like it!

I say, I wonder if our Scottish Academy's exhibition is going to be done at all for Appleton or whether he does not care for it. It might amuse me, although I am not fit for it. Why and O why doesn't Grove publish me?—Ever yours,

R. L. Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Swanston, Spring*, 1875], *Friday*

Write to you, it seems, I cannot. I hope, only, you will not draw any wrong conclusions. I cannot write letters—that is all. One of the things that keeps me unhappy is

just this, that I fear you will think I do not write because I am somehow changed towards you. Perhaps I am; I think not; I know I cannot spare you any more than before, my mother; I cling to you as a drowning man to a straw. Only I am changed to myself; all my *sham* goodness, I mean the orderliness, and citizenliness, and sort of respectability, that I had laid on, is going away and away down through wind into everlasting space. I cannot play these games; I am made for the other thing; as I grow well, I fall back into it, day by day. O don't forsake me for that; despise me if you like; though I can't see anything despicable in it—quite the reverse—only I'm so frightened you may; despise me if you please, my lady, but mind you, I'll do good work in spite of it all, even though I cannot catch trains (as now *I cannot*) and cannot write letters (O mea culpa! mea culpa!) and cannot keep engagements, nor, generally, do anything that a stout thoughtful citizen should do by nature, as he took his mother's milk.

*Saturday*.—Such pens as I have, and such an empty ink bottle! I have to paint and potter over half the words. Prose poems going on; also (fear not!) the law. The law comes in the second place; duly! Colvin never writes to me; it is past a joke. However, I don't deserve people to write to me, and, so long as they do not quarrel with me, I am content. God knows about the summer. My parents, I think, have it in their heads to follow me; they insist on Switzerland (the place of my pet abhorrence!) and now I hear them talk threateningly of London.

*Sunday*.—I must just send this scrap to you, though I am ashamed of it, and ashamed of the little I have done also. I have got the first chapter as good as I can get it. The second requires transcription still. The third, fourth, and fifth I haven't attempted yet, but I know about them.

My poet writes good stuff; it is slack still, and unequal, but I think some of it capital.

I simply can't write. Never mind, I shall see you in no very long time, and I shall bring all (all!) that I have written, and take a holiday. I really do work hard anyway; I take every bit of virtue I can get out of my body to put

into this poor story ; for poor story, of course, it will be ; I am not fool enough to expect anything else.

Ever your loving son,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## To Sidney Colvin

I was at this time revising for the *Portfolio* the substance of some Cambridge lectures on Hogarth.

[*Swanston, Spring,* 1875]

MY DEAR COLVIN,—I am a devil certainly ; but write I cannot. Look here, you had better get hold of G. C. Lichtenberg's *Ausfürliche Erklärung der Hogarthischen Kupferstiche :* Göttingen, 1794 to 1816 (it was published in numbers seemingly). Douglas the publisher lent it to me : and tho' I hate the damned tongue too cordially to do more than dip into it, I have seen some shrewd things. If you cannot get it for yourself (it seems scarce), I daresay I could negotiate with Douglas for a loan. This adorable spring has made me quite drunken, drunken with green colour and golden sound. We have the best blackbird here that we have had for years ; we have two ; but the other is but an average performer. Anything so rich and clear as the pipe of our first fiddle, it never entered into the heart of man to fancy. How the years slip away, Colvin ; and we walk little cycles, and turn in little abortive spirals, and come out again, hot and weary, to find the same view before us, the same hill barring the road. Only bless God for it, we have still the same eye to see with, and if the scene be not altogether unsightly, we can enjoy it whether or no. I feel quite happy, but curiously inert and passive, something for the winds to blow over, and the sun to glimpse on and go off again, as it might be a tree or a gravestone. All this willing and wishing and striving leads a man nowhere after all. Here I am back again in my old humour of a sunny equanimity ; to see the world fleet about me ; and the days chase each other like sun patches, and the nights like cloud-shadows, on a windy day ; content to

see them go and no wise reluctant for the cool evening, with its dew and stars and fading strain of tragic red. And I ask myself why I ever leave this humour? What I have gained? And the winds blow in the trees with a sustained "Pish!" and the birds answer me in a long derisive whistle.

So that for health, happiness, and indifferent literature, apply to—Ever yours,

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The idea which Stevenson here broaches of his possible intromission in ecclesiastical politics can hardly have been more than momentary and nowhere recurs. The character of George Wishart, the Scottish reformer, by his pupil, Emery Tylney, occurs in Tylney's *Narrative* in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*: in applying some words from it to his correspondent, Stevenson has to change the gender of the pronouns to suit her sex.

*Swanston, Thursday* [*Spring*, 1875]

My dear Friend,—Again a fine, moonlight night with a high wind; and again no news. Forgive me, if I be a little despondent when I am left in the dark; I cannot help it; and my despondency is at least of a serviceable and cheerful sort. I should go on working doggedly whatever turned up; and, whatever turned up, you would know what place you had in my intention. I think I am going to make a figure in Scotch ecclesiastical politics; at least I am turning over in my own mind the expediency of the step, as I have been doing for some time back; and more and more as days go by do I seem to see my way to doing possibly some good with small chance of harm. If the Church be virtuous enough to take my suggestion, it has the elements of life in it, and would live whether or no; I shall only give another heroic example for mankind; and, of these, we cannot have too many. If, on the other hand, it has too little virtue, or too much policy, I shall have done good service in unveiling a sham and struck an-

other deathblow at the existence of superannuated religion. Besides, I am not politic in these matters. I prefer to see men noble, even if it be to the ruin of my own views ; what I wish to see in the world is not the triumph of these views, but the multiplication of noble and disinterested men. The views may be hurtful ; good men will ever be helpful. These are very dark sayings, but if my purpose ripens you will see more clearly what I mean.

*Friday night.*—I am so glad to hear no ill of your health. You must not die. I cannot think of what life would be to me if you were gone ; a great black hole, without form and void. Please keep this in view. Although I speak jocularly I am grave at heart. I should be left to speak in the words of surely the most affecting historical document in the world—Emery Tylney's character of George Wishart, " O that the Lord had left her to me, her poor boy, that she might have finished what she had begun." I can't tell you how beautiful that whole paper is from which these words are imitated. I was reading it again the other day, and my heart came into my mouth when I got to that passage : one is so little prepared for such a cry of the soul amid the succinct details of life and manners that surround it. And the saying, in my mind, attaches itself to you : I have had to explain all round that you might understand the full meaning of the words and how they are not simply my words, but have been sanctified by the fire of martyrdom and the name of one of the good, pure, quiet delicate spirits of the Earth ; and you needed to know that to know why I like to apply them to you. I shall keep this letter until you are at Mrs. H.'s, as after my highland experience I have a horror of letters arriving after one is gone ; they might as well be cast into the sea with a millstone about their neck.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Swanston, Spring,* 1875], *Thursday*

I HAVE been in town, and had a fine time with toothache ;

I am writing such nice things—at least, so I fancy, I have no time for elaborate letters, and yet my heart is much with you, as you will see when you come to read what I have written.

*Friday*.—Since Tuesday evening, I have written six prose poems, and I shall likely do a seventh before night. At this rate, I shall have a book in no time. What about my exam? O God knows. To-morrow for that—to-morrow for that: I do believe some of them are good. There's one about Sudbury water-meadows which is simply a little masterpiece. I desire to repeat that, in case you might think I didn't mean it. I'm as cock-a-hoop as a man can be; and that, in spite of toothache which hangs round me and now and then makes a run in.

I have done "The quiet waters by"; that's Sudbury. "In a Garden," that's well, it's rather private. "A Summer Night," that's about staying out a whole night making plans in the streets of Edinburgh; Bob and I did it. "The drunkard and the Sea," that's a wild thing; that I am pleased with. "The Lighthouse: No. 1; On the roof": I'm going to have another called "The Light-room." Lastly, "A sermon by your leave"; but I don't know if they will give me leave. Of course, they'll remind people of Baudelaire, but I think they're really quite unlike.

*Saturday*.—Not a moment. Catch post. All well and jolly. Don't keep me too long, although after this sorry note, anything would be fair. Like Jingle in Pickwick. *Dieu vous bénisse*.

*Sunday*.—Interrupted. Well, you can't get a letter till Tuesday. I had a nice time to-day, hanging about the church outside in the sunshine, hearing the psalms and the strong solitary voice of the preacher. All the same, Sunday comes hard on me. The mind goes back of a Sunday; and repents. I hope you will like my prose poems. I hope you will like something of mine, anyway. I think there are some of the bits of letters I have written to you that might come in; a letter for instance, I wrote last May or June about the green and daisies and great

spring winds. Perhaps, too, a thing I sent last winter about the lamp in the chapel.

Ever yours,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## TO MRS. SITWELL

[*Swanston, Spring*, 1875], *Sunday*

I DON'T know why the recurrence of this day always depresses me; but it does. O the bitter, bitter, dead, empty life—it is dull and vile.

I am teaching my cousin Algebra, have I told you? It is something to cling to, that makes me feel as if my life were less hollow. Goodnight.

*Monday*.—A steeping rain, a wet mist, clings and falls about our wooded garden. It is wet and cold and sorry.

My father has been quite sewed up for some days back, by Clifford's article (a fine article it was, too). I wish he hadn't been, poor man, for he has enough on his shoulders just now. The world is not using him well. As indeed, does it use anyone.

O the wild wet world, the soaking rain, the aching heart. And I am so well, all the same, brown and strong and growing fatter, they say. Thanks be to God for all His mercies! I lick my greasy lips, "Give me some more pudding, please God. I am a good boy. This is the best of possible worlds, and you are a very fine fellow for having made it." Noble R. L. S.!

*Tuesday*.—I could not sleep, so I arose about half-past six, and went out into the breathing world. You must be very miserable indeed if you can be miserable in the open air. It stupefies and woos and amuses you; it is like some great healthy narcotic; and the visions are visions of green trees, and men ploughing, and larks, and the golden morning clouds breaking and showing us the high blue sky beyond. *A la bonne heure!* After all, life is very liveable under the open sky. It is in houses mostly that the blue devils do

consort. Goodbye. I am as fresh and jolly as the open air.

Ever your faithful friend,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

XIV prose poems in existence now !—No. 15 ! !

## To MRS. SITWELL

*Burns* means the article on Burns which R. L. S. had been commissioned to write for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The "awfully nice man" was the Hon. J. Seed, formerly Secretary to the Customs and Marine Department of New Zealand; and it was from his conversation that the notion of the Samoan Islands as a place of refuge for the sick and world-worn first entered Stevenson's mind, to lie dormant (I never heard him speak of it) and be revived thirteen years later.

[*Edinburgh, Spring*, 1875]

SIMPLY a scratch. All right, jolly, well, and through with the difficulty. My father pleased about the *Burns*. Never travel in the same carriage with three able-bodied seamen and a fruiterer from Kent; the A.-B.'s speak all night as though they were hailing vessels at sea; and the fruiterer as if he were crying fruit in a noisy market-place—such, at least, is my *funeste* experience. I wonder if a fruiterer from some place else—say Worcestershire—would offer the same phenomena? insoluble doubt.

R. L. S.

*Later*.—Forgive me, couldn't get it off. Awfully nice man here to-night. Public servant—New Zealand. Telling us all about the South Sea Islands till I was sick with desire to go there; beautiful places, green for ever; perfect climate; perfect shapes of men and women, with red flowers in their hair; and nothing to do but to study oratory and etiquette, sit in the shun, and pick up the fruits as they fall. Navigator's Island is the place; absolute balm for the weary.—Ever your faithful friend,

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

Stevenson's first visit to Barbizon in the forest of Fontainebleau, besides being the occasion of an immediate temporary improvement in his health and spirits, marked also the beginning of a great and abiding change in his life and habits. The letter next following his return announces his consciousness of such a change.

[*Barbizon, Spring*, 1875]

My dear,—I am much better here in the forest, but not yet quite what I ought to be. I went about your sister's affair on Monday before I left Paris, but it was *un jour férié* and they would do nothing for me. I shall see to it when I go back. I am exposing my mind to the forest day by day, and hope it is going to get into an article to redeem my failure. I suppose, of course, that no news means good news. Hotel Siron, Barbizon, Seine et Marne.

Ever your faithful

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Paris, Spring*, 1875]

My dear, the Gods are against me. I have missed the trains so freely that I am stuck here for yet another night. I shall be in London, however, to-morrow at six. I shall go straight to the club, in hopes of finding Colvin, or a note from you. It is the most splendid weather, the trees are out along the bright streets in their first greens, and the whole town sounds and shines about one, so that it goes to the head like wine.

Ever your faithful

Robert Louis Stevenson.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, Spring*, 1875], *Friday*

For the first time for so long, there has come a real rent in my life ; and that was when I managed to be happy for a

while, without afterthought, in my old easy way ; managed to take food and drink, and the sweet winds and sun, and trees, and people, as they came to me, and be glad in them without irony. Well, you know what that did ; it made some years become the past ; it closed up a long, long present ; my life went into another tense. I cannot say how glad I am of it, how glad I am to feel my own body again, and recognize my own laugh. And yet I don't quite know how to say it, but I despise myself a little that it should have happened. I must not write about that, though ; for the wolves are at the door ; I must wait for the perfect day, before I unbolt it and go fairly out into the sunshine, me and my whole pack of thoughts, as in old times.

And remember this always, when I say I find myself again, I mean I have found much that was me, nay, and most, nay, and I think *all*, only there is another thought in it now. This spirit of mine must ever be somewhat holy ground ; your son must be better than the sons of other people, madonna.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

The examination for the Bar at Edinburgh was approaching. *Fontainebleau* is the paper called *Forest Notes*, afterwards printed in the *Cornhill Magazine*. The church is Glencorse Church in the Pentlands, to the thoughts of which Stevenson reverted in his last days with so much emotion (see *Weir of Hermiston*, chap. v).

[*Swanston. End of June*, 1875]

*Thursday*.—This day fortnight I shall fall or conquer. Outside the rain still soaks ; but now and again the hill-top looks through the mist vaguely. I am very comfortable, very sleepy, and very much satisfied with the arrangements of Providence.

*Saturday—no, Sunday*, 12.45.—Just been—not grinding, alas !—I couldn't—but doing a bit of *Fontainebleau*. I don't think I'll be plucked. I am not sure though—I am so busy, what with this d—d law, and this *Fontainebleau* always

at my elbow, and three plays (three, think of that !) and a story, all crying out to me, " Finish, finish, make an entire end, make us strong, shapely, viable creatures ! " It's enough to put a man crazy. Moreover, I have my thesis given out now, which is a fifth (is it fifth ? I can't count) incumbrance.

*Sunday*.—I've been to church, and am not depressed—a great step. I was at that beautiful church my *petit poème en prose* was about. It is a little cruciform place, with heavy cornices and string course to match, and a steep slate roof. The small kirkyard is full of old gravestones. One of a Frenchman from Dunkerque—I suppose he died prisoner in the military prison hard by—and one, the most pathetic memorial I ever saw, a poor school-slate, in a wooden frame, with the inscription cut into it evidently by the father's own hand. In church, old Mr. Torrance preached—over eighty, and a relic of times forgotten, with his black thread gloves and mild old foolish face. One of the nicest parts of it was to see John Inglis, the greatest man in Scotland, our Justice-General, and the only born lawyer I ever heard, listening to the piping old body, as though it had all been a revelation, grave and respectful.—Ever your faithful

R. L. S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Edinburgh, July* 15, 1875]

Passed.

Ever your
R.
L.
S.

## To Mrs. Sitwell

[*Swanston, Summer*, 1875], *Saturday*

I can make no plans for the summer. I do not think I shall get my thousand pounds ; and indeed all my ideas of taking more money from my people vanished from me as

soon as I shook off the barbarism of the forest (see my Fontainebleau article, which ought to be a beauty); I am going to pay back the ten pounds that were advanced to me. Gumminess also is gone; it went the length of a pair of dress boots and there miserably perished. Life is a curious problem (original remark: copyright); and I do not see my way through it very distinctly at present. I do so hunger and thirst after money (i.e. happiness); *and yet to get that, I must give up my hope of making myself strong and well* (*i.e. happiness*). Two birds are building a nest in the holly before my window; you should see them fly up with great straws in their mouths; God prosper them. They are better off than we; they are not obliged to play other people's games, wear other people's clothes, walk with other people's gait, and say other people's silly words after them by leaden rote, under pain of breaking hearts and drawing hot tears and driving home the gross dagger of disappointment into breasts full of hope. There, you see, I am as moral as ever, again, God help me. Wild work, madonna, wild work—this decency to others. I may say with Sir Andrew, "Nay, I care not for good life!" It seems to me the wildest of follies, the most indecent prodigality of our little hopes and chances; and yet—Hey, diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon. From circumference to middle, the whole is a riddle, and I hope to be out of it soon.—Impromptu verses: copyright. Adieu. Well, one thing I have to be thankful for to "Whatever Gods may be." I am no longer the miserable perverse tremulous childish DEVIL, who came down to London in March. I could throw my hat over the house when I think of it—over the house?—over Uranus.

Always your faithful,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

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